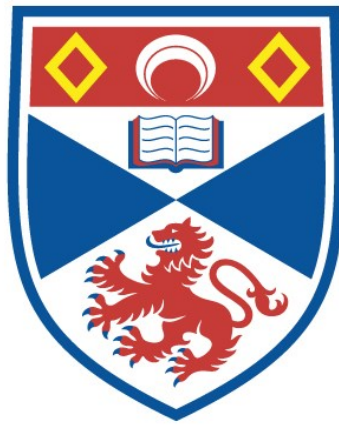


THE ROLE OF SECULAR DISCOURSE IN THEOLOGICAL
ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE DOCTRINE OF SIN : A
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ALISTAIR MCFADYEN AND
KARL BARTH

Edward J.N. Russell

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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**The Role of Secular Discourse in Theological
Anthropology and the Doctrine of Sin:**

A Comparative Study of Alistair McFadyen and Karl Barth

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

Edward J. N. Russell

St Mary's College,
St. Andrews,
Scotland
October, 2002



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ABSTRACT

Contemporary theology increasingly is concerned with 'inter-disciplinary dialogue'. There has, however, been little work done on the under-girding structures of such a dialogue. The central concern of this thesis is to explore the methodological foundations for the relation between 'theology' and 'secular discourse'. Although there are many possibilities for testing the relation between theology and secular discourse, theological anthropology and the doctrine of sin are used as the primary testing grounds because they are central to the concerns of much contemporary systematic theology as well as being areas to which the secular world has much to contribute. Alistair McFadyen's and Karl Barth's work in these areas is adopted as the particular focus of the thesis. Together their work offers a rich environment for analysing the methodological issues at stake in the relationship between theology and secular discourse. The primary aim of the thesis is to offer an approach to inter-disciplinary dialogue which maintains 'the priority of God' in theological method whilst recognising that engagement with secular discourse enables theology 'to do its job better'. Drawing from McFadyen's and Barth's work in theological anthropology and the doctrine of sin, some methodological foundations for structuring the relation between theology and secular discourse are laid out and stated in a more widely applicable form.

DECLARATIONS

(i) I, Edward J. N. Russell, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100, 000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date 12/6/03 Signature of Candidate

(ii) I was admitted as a research student in January, 2000 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in November, 2000; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between January, 2000 and October, 2002.

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(iii) I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions for the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of St. Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date Signature of Supervisor

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To Anastasia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing a thesis with theological anthropology and the doctrine of sin as its primary subject matter the author cannot help but learn two lessons. The first is that persons truly are constituted in relation and consequently a huge debt of gratitude is owed to a great number of people. The second is an increasing awareness of the fallibility of human reasoning. Although the former lesson necessitates acknowledging the debt owed to those people who have helped shape this thesis in a significant way, the latter requires that I take responsibility for any mistakes and oversights which remain.

I own an immense debt to my supervisors Jeremy Begbie and Trevor Hart, both of whom have waded through numerous drafts with patience and diligence. When they have been forced to point me in different directions and show me the error of my ways it was always with wisdom, learning and compassion. Additionally, particular thanks is due to Alan Torrance who has taught and supported me from my earliest days as an undergraduate. Mention should also be made of Alistair McFadyen – not only for writing the books which became the focus of half the thesis – but also for taking an interest in my work and offering encouragement even when his own scholarship was under the knife in the hands of an apprentice surgeon.

The community at St Mary's College and the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts have been better than could possibly have been hoped for in many ways. Both the 'Theology Research Seminar' and the 'ITIA Seminar' provided the opportunity to display my ignorance on a weekly basis, whilst I hope not remaining in it. The faculty was always supportive and prepared to give time to other people's students even under the heavy demands of an academic year (or retirement – Michael Partridge). Colin Bovaird and Lynda Kinloch never ceased to be a joy to see when entering the King James Library in St Mary's – especially in the long dark hours of winter. The postgraduate community particularly has offered much academically, socially and spiritually. Of the many who accompanied me over countless coffees, pints and Munros (including Glencoe Mountain Rescue!) I mention Tony Clark, Kristen Deede, Poul Guttesen, Jane Rowland, Tim and Amy Moore,

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Both my parents have sacrificed so much to enable me to undertake this project. They have not only offered generous financial assistance and provided my family and me with somewhere to live, but offered unfailing support, energy and encouragement. My mother has continued to work in paid employment and would have retired long ago were it not for me and neither this, nor her garden (!) has gone un-noticed. My father's 'eye for detail' and considerable learning has played no small part in my theological development and for this too I am grateful. It is with great pride that my wife and I will have produced a grandchild for you by the time this thesis has been examined – and a boy who will be eligible to play at Murrayfield as well as Lansdowne Road and Twickenham!

Finally, the debt owed to my wife Anna cannot be properly expressed. Her love, patience and forbearance testify to how impressive a person she is. Whilst working in the Intensive Care Unit in Dundee she has found the time to run an immaculate house, host countless dinner parties, home groups and film evenings, look after other people's children and produce one of our own. It is with great pleasure that I dedicate this thesis to her.

Edward Russell
St Mary's College,
All Saints Day, 2002

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CD – Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, various volumes.

CTP – Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

BTS – Alistair I. McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

SJT – *Scottish Journal of Theology*

CHAPTER 1

Approaches to the Relation between Secular Discourse and Theology:

John Webster and David Ford

1. Introduction

Let me begin with a brief story.¹ A company which had been successful in the production of drill bits entered a time when their sales and profits began to fall. In order to address the problem, consultants were brought in to advise the company about what it should do. The consultants who were employed at great expense took some months to look at the business and interview staff and customers before making their report. The day came when they reported to the Board and did so with only three Power Point visuals:

1. This company thinks that it is in business to make drill bits.
2. It isn't.
3. This company exists to make holes.

At this point the consultants sat down and the Board members were perplexed at the brevity of the presentation given the scale of the expense. However, the money had been well spent as the firm later became a world leader in using laser technology to make holes. The point of the story in a Christian context is that the church often confuses ends with means and (so to say) tries hard to be more effective in

¹ I am indebted to my father, the Venerable Norman A. Russell, for this illustration. It is an illustration that has gone round some clergy circles and neither he nor I are sure of its origin.

manufacturing drill bits when it needs to be clear about its core task and the nature of the changing context within which it is placed.²

This, I suggest, is a challenge that is also faced by contemporary theology. It is a necessary task of the Christian theologian to reflect critically on the trinitarian self-revelation of God as testified to in the Christian scriptures, doctrine, tradition and history, as well as attending to the situation in which the theologian functions. Analogous to the company mentioned in the story above, the challenge lies in identifying the core tasks of Christian theology in such a way that the concerns of the contemporary world are addressed, but the distinctive Christian content remains. Often the problem is approached in theology by adopting one of three broad positions in one form or another.³ The first, the 'liberal' position, adopts an open attitude to the demands of the present possibly at the expense of the authority of the past. The second 'conservative' position strongly maintains the authority of the past sometimes at the expense of present concerns. The final 'radical' position is open to fundamental change in the present usually through re-interpreting the roots of Christianity. Although these distinctions may be useful as general designators and set the scene for our broader concerns, they are too general to be of much value as a typology. What they do highlight is the general question which lies at the very core of this thesis:

'How ought Christian theology to be done?'

² I am reminded of a well known quotation from Barth: "I did not have anything new to say in that first issue of *Theological Existence Today* apart from what I had always endeavoured to say: that we could have no other gods than God, that holy scripture was enough to guide the church into all truth, that the grace of Jesus Christ was enough to forgive our sins and to order our life. The only thing was that now I suddenly had to say this in a different situation. It was no longer just an academic theory. Without any conscious intention or endeavour on my part, it took on the character of an appeal, a challenge, a battle-cry, a confession. It was not I who had changed: the room in which I had to speak had changed dramatically, and so had its resonance. As I repeated this doctrine consistently in this new room, at the same time it took on a new depth and became a practical matter, for decision and action." (Cited in Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1976, p227).

³ I follow David F. Ford in this characterisation and in the appeal to Hans Frei's 'types' which are to follow shortly (*Theology: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp20f.). Cf. also Trevor A. Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology*, London: SPCK, 1995, esp. Chapter 8.

This chapter seeks first to set out briefly a more appropriate typology so that the particular concerns of the thesis can be positioned with regard to a broader theological landscape. Second, two positions from the typology which are to become the polar positions for this thesis will be explored in more detail using a recent debate between John Webster and David Ford which highlights many of the key issues. Finally, some indication will be given of the direction the thesis will take and some important terms will be introduced. Before doing this it is worth pausing to take heed of a comment from Hans Frei:

Somebody rightly said, "A person either has character or he invents a method". I believe that I have been trying for years to trade method for character, since at heart I really don't believe in independent methodological study of theology (I think the theory is dependent upon the practice), but so far I haven't found that I am a seller to myself as a purchaser.⁴

In the opening chapter of what is a thesis on theological method, Frei's comment is especially poignant. Two preliminary points are worth making here. First in echoing Frei, the primary task of the theologian is to 'do' theology, not to engage in a second (or third) level order of reflection on how to do theology. However, as Frei also stated, theory is dependent upon practice, and so theological method can only become clear by 'doing' theology. It is hoped that although the concern of this thesis is primarily with theological method, some valuable theology is also produced in the process. And second, part of the process of 'doing' theology is to reflect on how it should be done, what the implications are of doing it in a certain way, and indeed, what theology actually is. In other words, approaching theology through theological method brings to the fore the very heart of what it might mean to be a theologian. Attending to theological method in this way prevents the theologian from pressing on with the manufacture of drill bits as it were, and re-evaluating once again the core tenets of the Christian faith. Following from this, one of the main aims

⁴ Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, p19.

of this thesis is to outline an approach to theology whereby the theologian can be responsible within the present context, but is not responsible to that context. We begin with a typology that addresses some ways in which theology can be done.

2. Types of Christian Theology

Hans Frei rightly recognised a polarity which is faced by the theologian.⁵ On the one hand, Christian theology is an instance of a general class or generic type. As such, it is to be subsumed under general criteria of intelligibility, coherence and truth which is shared with other academic disciplines. On the other hand, theology is an aspect of Christianity and is therefore partly or wholly defined by its relation to the cultural or semiotic system that constitutes that religion. In this case, theology tends to have two main tasks: a first order descriptive task whereby the 'grammar' or 'internal-logic' of Christian beliefs and practices are articulated, and a second order critical task to judge such articulation a success or failure according to the norms governing Christian use of language. In short, the distinction that Frei is identifying is between approaching Christian theology from a position external to its own rationality, or from within it.

Frei's distinction is closely related to many such polarities which also operate within Christian theology and may also be approached through the typology outlined below. Perhaps the classic typology of this sort is H. Richard Niebuhr's polarity between 'Christ' and 'culture'.⁶ Even though Niebuhr's typology is highly influential

⁵ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, p2.

⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, Harper Torch Books, 1975.

and remains widely accepted, Frei's typology will be used.⁷ There are three main reasons for this. First, Frei's polarity is closer to the polarity operative in this thesis – theology and secular discourse. Second, Niebuhr wrongly understands 'culture' as both monolithic and autonomous.⁸ And third, a strong case can also be made for Niebuhr's picture of 'Christ' also being deficient.⁹ Having said this, it is worth emphasising that Niebuhr's typology remains dominant, particularly in the United States.¹⁰ However, Frei's typology is widely used and, in the United Kingdom, it has perhaps received most attention from David Ford who opens his undergraduate lectures in systematic theology with it.¹¹

One of the main problems of any typology is that exceptions can always be found to each type and few people like thinking of their thought as easily placed within (or reduced to) a category. This is certainly evident in the reception and use of both Niebuhr's and Frei's typologies (not to mention a number of others).¹² As with any typology, its usefulness can only be determined in accordance with its use – that is, how helpful the categories are in furthering our understanding of its object – which in

⁷ Another typology which could have potential mileage for this thesis is set out in Roberts, Richard H. 'Theology and the Social Sciences', in Ford, David F., (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, pp700-719.

⁸ This point amongst others is made in a magnificent critique of Niebuhr by John H. Yoder ('How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of *Christ and Culture*', in Stassen, Glen H., Yeager, D. M., and Yoder, John H. (eds.), *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, Abingdon Press, 1996). See also Christoph Schwöbel. 'Once Again, Christ and Culture: Remarks on the Christological Bases of a Theology of Culture', in Colin E. Gunton (ed.), *Trinity, Time, and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

⁹ Again see Yoder, 'How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned'.

¹⁰ Although according to David Ford, one of Frei's most significant achievements is to carry "forward the Yale theological tradition of his teacher H. Richard Niebuhr" (David F. Ford, 'On Being Theologically Hospitable to Jesus Christ: Hans Frei's Achievement', *Journal of Theological Studies* 46.2, October, 1995, p532.).

¹¹ This is reflected in Ford's introductory book on theology (*Theology*, pp20f.) as well as other publications. See for instance: David F. Ford, 'Hans Frei and the Future of Theology', *Modern Theology* 8.2 (April 1992), pp203-14, and Ford, 'On Being Theologically Hospitable to Jesus Christ: Hans Frei's Achievement', pp532-46.

¹² Colin Gunton, for instance, has raised some question about his 'conceptual redescription' of Barth (Colin Gunton, 'Review: Types of Christian Theology', in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 49/2, 1996, pp233-234). It is also worth bearing in mind that one of Frei's main aims of his 'Types' was to do better justice to the Christian tradition than other typologies and he may well have been successful in this – even if there remains room for further improvement.

the case of this thesis, will be evident in two main ways. The first, is to set out briefly the 'geography' of the theological landscape vis-à-vis 'secular discourse', and the second is to develop two particular 'types' in accordance with the aims and concerns of the thesis. These two 'types' will be redefined and developed at length below.

Frei develops a typology which highlights five possible approaches to his polarity. The typology might be thought of as a continuum between these two poles with varying priority given to each. Before setting this out, it is worth noting that there may be a further possible type between Types 3 and 4 which Frei himself has acknowledged but has never developed.¹³ The possibility of a further type will be considered in some length in Chapter 6 below. Echoing Frei's own concerns, this thesis will focus on Types 3 and 4. We turn now to the five-fold typology.

Type 1. This type gives absolute priority to the first pole, that is, approaching Christian theology from without. Theology is understood as a philosophical discipline in the academy which takes complete priority over Christian self-description. Theology of this type tends to emulate the philosophical character of the discipline to which it occupies a subordinate position. The 'pressure of interpretation'¹⁴ moves from a philosophy, worldview, or practical agenda to Christian theology.

Type 2. Type 2 is similar to Type 1 in that theology is treated as a philosophical or academic discipline from the outside, but the specificity of the

¹³ To my knowledge this is yet to be explored. David Ford reports Frei as saying that "he would probably place himself between Types 3 and 4" (Ford, 'On Being Theologically Hospitable to Jesus Christ: Hans Frei's Achievement', pp538, 544), but I am yet to find any other mention of this in the literature. However, Ford also recognises the possibilities of defining the existing types in other, more diverse ways and indeed emphasises this (Ford, 'Hans Frei and the Future of Theology', p205, and Ford, 'On Being Theologically Hospitable to Jesus Christ: Hans Frei's Achievement', p536).

¹⁴ For this phrase I am indebted to Professor Alan J. Torrance, who adopted it from Professor Daniel W. Hardy. It is an expression referring to the movement or direction of a framework of understanding. See Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation with Special Reference to Volume One of Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, p201.

Christian religion is taken seriously in such a way that the external description and self-description become merged. In other words, an approach is adopted whereby the foundational starting point lies in a particular philosophy or worldview but is adopted in such a way as to accommodate the uniqueness of the Christian message. Contemporary thought is used as a model for re-interpreting what is taken to be core Christian commitments. Again the pressure of interpretation moves from philosophy to theology.

Type 3. Type 3 is the midpoint between the two poles. In this type, theology is an academic discipline in its own right, but it is equally dependent upon a general philosophical approach and Christian self-description. It does not recognise the adequacy of any single framework but does recognise that many philosophies and worldviews are useful resources for doing Christian theology. Generally this approach proceeds by way of a 'correlation' between issues raised by the Christian faith and those raised outside it. The aim is to develop a 'dialogue'. Neither pole holds ultimate primacy. Insofar as possible, priority is not given to theology or philosophy.

Type 4. This type gives priority to Christian self-description. Theology is not philosophically founded, and what makes theology an orderly and systematic procedure is not a set of formal, universal criteria but rules which develop from within. To this extent, philosophy is subordinate to theology, and although many useful insights can be derived from philosophy, the pressure of interpretation moves from theology to philosophy. No other framework or worldview can dictate how to understand the Christian faith.

Type 5. Type 5 gives absolute priority to the second pole – approaching theology from within. It does not even offer a subordinate place for philosophy

within theology. The criteria for coherence, adequacy, and appropriateness are derived solely from Christian self-description. There is no place for any worldview or philosophy for determining the form or content of Christian theology. All of reality is interpreted in terms of a traditional understanding of Christianity and there is limited scope for dialogue. The pressure of interpretation moves irreducibly from theology to any other worldview or framework.

Both Types 1 and 5, the polar positions, interpret all of reality exclusively from within their own frames of reference – whether Christian or secular. There is a limited possibility of dialogue between the two positions. By way of contrast, Types 2-4 place a different priority on the significance of the polar positions in the shaping of their standpoint, but are by and large open to some kind of dialogue between the various positions. This is clearly most evident in Type 3 where a correlation is sought between the two poles.

The main concern of this thesis is to attempt to do justice to two necessary aspects of theology.¹⁵ The first is to reflect critically on Christian doctrine, tradition, and history giving special weight to God's self-revelation in Christ through the Spirit from the perspective of the Christian faith. The specific meaning of this will become clear during the thesis. The second aspect is to engage critically with the social, cultural, and intellectual world in which we are living. It is to be argued that these are not two tasks but two aspects of a single task. Put more strongly, these dual aspects of a single task are necessary (but insufficient) conditions for doing Christian theology. It is this very point that we find being made in the introduction to Paul Tillich's three volume *Systematic Theology* when he suggests two basic needs for

¹⁵ See Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp10-11; Hart, *Faith Thinking*, esp. Chapter 10.

theology: "[1] the statement of the truth of the Christian message and [2] the interpretation of this truth for every new generation".¹⁶ Let me unpack this further.

On the one hand, theology is a second (and third) order level of reflection upon the core tenets of the Christian faith, doctrine, practice, and life. Theology is therefore in large part about Christian self-description (Frei's second pole). This is to determine both the form and content of theology – that is, how theology is to be done. In large part this is what Karl Barth was referring to when, in an article written in Bonn in 1933, he argued that it was important to do "theology and only theology... *as though nothing had happened*".¹⁷ In other words, theology is not dependent upon the determinate situation in any way. T. F. Torrance echoes this view in an introduction to a volume of Barth's papers when he suggests that Barth's intention was to create "a radical separation between theology and culture, which he felt to be eminently necessary if we were to think clearly again about God, and about man, and of their reconciliation in Jesus Christ".¹⁸ Even though Torrance is overstating Barth's case, the issue to be faced here is whether or not theology is in any way dependent upon engaging with culture, and if so, whether this is best served by doing theology 'as though nothing had happened'.¹⁹

On the other hand, theology is not done in a vacuum. It is precisely because of this that it has been argued, for instance, that the Barth-Brunner debate of 1934 was

¹⁶ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology Volume I*, London: Nisbet & Co., 1951, p3. Interestingly, there is a strong resemblance here to a theological approach adopted by a thinker from Type 4 (Tillich is Type 3). I am referring specifically to 'contextualization' as expounded in Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, London: SPCK, 1989, esp. Chapter 12.

¹⁷ Cited in Busch, *Karl Barth*, p226 [my italics].

¹⁸ Karl Barth, *Theology and the Church*, London, 1962, p22, cited in J. W. Thomas, 'The Problem of Defining a Theology of Culture with Reference to the Theology of Paul Tillich', in R. W. A. McKinney (ed.), *Creation, Christ, and Culture: Studies in Honour of T. F. Torrance*, T & T Clark, 1976, p272..

¹⁹ It might be worth adding that in the context of 1933 Germany, Barth's approach to theology was *indirectly* a political commitment as is evident by his refusal to open lectures with a Hitler salute as was required, opting for a prayer instead (Busch, *Karl Barth*, pp234, 242).

highly engaged with culture.²⁰ Barth believed Brunner's position to be giving consent, albeit tacit, to the German Christian's embrace of National Socialism. All theology, indeed all human activity, is necessarily bound to its particular socio-historical location. This is not to say that this location cannot be transcended, rather, that all theology is a product of its time. Consequently, it is a major task for all theology to re-think and re-interpret the deposit of faith for each particular time. Paul Tillich's 'method of correlation' is perhaps the definitive example of a theology in which the content of theology is largely oriented by the determinate situation.²¹ The issue to be faced here is the extent to which culture (or Frei's first pole) should be determinative for theology.

However, the concern of this thesis is *not* to present a 'theology of culture', although there will be significant implications for a 'theology of culture'. Rather, the concern is with how Frei's two poles should be related within Christian theology. The polar positions of Frei's typology – Types 1 and 5 – will not be considered here as neither attempts to do justice to the dual aspects of the theological task. The focus will be more specific – examining the nature of the 'dialogue' between Frei's two poles. Of particular interest here are Types 3 and 4 as it is these that appear to do the most justice to the twofold task of Christian theology as previously stated.²² The significance of these Types in relation to this thesis is brought out well in a recent exchange between John Webster and David Ford to which we now turn.

²⁰ The debate can be found in Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, *Natural Theology*, Peter Fraenkel (trans.), London: The Centenary Press, 1946. See also Trevor A. Hart, 'The Capacity for Ambiguity: Revisiting the Barth-Brunner Debate', in *Regarding Karl Barth: Toward a Reading of His Theology*, IVP, 1999; and John W. Hart, *Karl Barth Vs. Emil Brunner: The Formation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance, 1916-1936 (Issues in Systematic Theology, Vol. 6)*, New York: Peter Lang, 2001.

²¹ See Tillich, *Systematic Theology Volume I*, Chapters 1 and 2, esp. pp67f..

²² Notably it is these two Types towards which Frei is inclined and examines in depth. See Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, Chapter 6.

3. The John Webster/ David Ford Debate

David Ford's recent book *Self and Salvation* represents a way of doing theology that is becoming increasingly popular.²³ In terms of Frei's typology, Ford's *Self and Salvation* might be placed in Type 3 (albeit with a leaning toward Type 4).²⁴ However, Ford's thought can be placed in Type 3 for different reasons than other theologies of this Type such as Paul Tillich's.²⁵ Whereas Tillich functions with an existential (universal) framework from which he approaches theology, Ford emphatically rejects any such framework. His work generally proceeds on the basis of *ad hoc* correlations between particulars. This said, Ford's work does not give explicit priority to either theology or his conversation partners and therefore falls into Type 3.²⁶ In this regard it is worth citing Frei:

The third type also seeks to correlate theology as a procedure subject to formal, universal, and transcendental criteria for valid thinking, with theology as specific and second-order Christian self-description; but unlike the second type, it proposes no super-theory or comprehensive structure for integrating them, only *ad hoc* procedures...²⁷

Where Ford's work can be placed in Type 3, John Webster's work fits firmly in Type 4 (possibly with a leaning toward Type 5).²⁸ The emphasis in Webster's work is definitely placed on theology at the expense of secular discourse.

There are a number of reasons why we might be concerned with this debate – both are heavily indebted to Barth and end up in very different positions; one is Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge (Ford), the other is Lady

²³ David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

²⁴ This would not be true of Ford's earlier work which would fit with Type 4 (for instance in David F. Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics*, New York: Peter Lang, 1985). It is significant that Ford first had a grounding in 'dogmatics proper' before entering into a more imaginative theological method. In this chapter when I refer to Ford, it is the Ford of *Self and Salvation*.

²⁵ It is worth noting that Frei does not place Tillich firmly in Type 3, instead he uses Schleiermacher as the example.

²⁶ I suspect that Ford would prefer to think of his thought as Type 4 – if, that is, he was prepared to place it in a type!

²⁷ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, p3.

²⁸ See for instance his most recent book: John Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001.

Margaret Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford (Webster) – but there are two main reasons why we are looking at it. First, their respective approaches to theology correspond to two major ways in which the concerns of this thesis can be approached – the relation between theological and secular discourse. As such, their thought (Types 3 and 4) represents the polar positions operative in this thesis. And second, the debate is still current, raises many of the key issues with which the thesis is concerned, and focuses on a book that is in the same series as the book which is the main focus of Chapter 3 ('Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine'). As such, the debate functions as an excellent introduction to the respective positions of Alistair McFadyen and Karl Barth.

The debate is contained in a review article of *Self and Salvation* by John Webster with a response by David Ford.²⁹ At the core, it is concerned with how theology ought to be done. We begin by drawing out the key challenges which Webster poses, then consider Ford's response. Finally, a brief evaluation of the debate will be offered. Insofar as possible, I will only focus on the key methodological points that are raised and not on the detail. The significance of the debate here is to raise the key issues for the thesis, not to evaluate the accuracy of the review.

3.1 John Webster's Review

John Webster's opening comments do not refer so much to the content of *Self and Salvation* as to "its style and genre" by which "the reader is overwhelmed by the

²⁹ John Webster, 'Article Review: David F. Ford: *Self and Salvation*', and David F. Ford, 'Salvation and the Nature of Theology – A Response to John Webster's Review of *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*', in *SJT*, 54/4, 2001, pp548-575.

possibilities for reflection which are opened up”.³⁰ Webster writes: “this is not a piece of *straight systematics*. It is an exploratory and interrogative reflection on a number of themes in Christian soteriology and anthropology, undertaken in conversation with strands of phenomenology and some more informal materials concerning human practices”.³¹ In other words, it is clear from the outset that Webster’s main concern with *Self and Salvation* is not with the content but with the style, i.e., how it does what it is trying to do.³²

Self and Salvation is split into two parts, both of which Webster considers.³³ In the first part, Ford enters into dialogue with various thinkers. Even though Webster does raise some question about Ford’s choice of interlocutors,³⁴ “the real question raised by part one of the book is: what sort of theology is this?”.³⁵ Webster suggests that part one is “best read as an attempt at an elliptical prologue to Christianity”, and consequently poses the question: “why not just cut to the chase?”.³⁶ The issue is, in short, one of how theology is to be done. Webster puts this in question form:

in the absence of sustained engagement with either some of the major biblical testimony on soteriology or classical Christian teaching, how can the book be protected from being driven by concerns which – however evocative, however pertinent to bits of high culture – are not immediately recognisable as emerging from attention to the Christian gospel but rather seem to derive from elsewhere? ... Is there a given shape, a (flexible) canon of texts and problems in which it is the first task of the theologian to be instructed and in the face of which originality is unimportant? Or is Christian theology a kind of *poiesis*, a free Christian commentary on a great range of sources of stimulation whose aim is not so much catechetical as one of ‘inspiring a diversity of investigations and discussions, acting as a framework for creativity, encouraging a new look at familiar problems, ambiguities and dilemmas, and opening fresh lines of dialogue with other soteriologies’ (p.4)?³⁷

The question Webster is posing, is in a different form, that of whether theology should be done according to Type 3 or Type 4. At this point, Webster

³⁰ Webster, *Review*, p548.

³¹ Webster, *Review*, p548 (my italics).

³² It is worth adding that it is not possible to separate form and content like this as we shall see time and time again below. The form of the argument directly affects the content, and so Webster’s concern is also with the content.

³³ The Parts are titled (respectively): ‘Dialogues: Levinas, Jünger, Ricoeur’; and ‘Flourishings’.

³⁴ Webster, *Review*, p552.

³⁵ Webster, *Review*, p550.

³⁶ Webster, *Review*, p551.

³⁷ Webster, *Review*, p551.

clearly places Ford in Type 3, but is indicating that he thinks theology should (can only?) be done in Type 4.³⁸ This comes through further in his consideration of Part 2 of *Self and Salvation*.

Regarding Part 2, in which the reader might be 'left rather breathless after this highly-charged, very busy, book', Webster poses two sorts of questions, one about doctrinal commitments (focusing largely on Christology and what he considers the elusiveness of the book's central concept – the dead face of Christ), and the other about the nature of Christian theology. In engaging with the book's doctrinal commitments, Webster is drawn into some of the detail, and so we simply note that he believes that the book "concentrates largely on Christianity as a form of human life or religion, and only secondarily or derivatively is it concerned with God *in se* [Type 2?]"³⁹ With regard to the nature of Christian theology, Webster 'wonder[s] about the dogmatic fruitfulness of the mode of theology here pursued'. The aim of the book, Webster recognises, is simply 'to respond to God'. As a result Ford is drawn into a rich and imaginative engagement with a plethora of voices: philosophers, musicians, poets, anthropologists, and historians to name but a few. By way of contrast, Webster suggests that theology should be conducted differently, and I quote at length:

There would be a quite different way of going about a theology of salvation, even a theology of *self* and salvation. This would involve, not engagement in conversations of ever increasing range and complexity, but a focused attentiveness to and concentration upon a relatively small set of themes as they emerge in a canon of texts, at whose centre is Holy Scripture, around which are arranged the greater and lesser commentaries which we call the Christian tradition. Engaging in this kind of theology would require the theologian a kind of asceticism, a laying aside, an *inattention* to all sorts of stimuli, and a dogged persistence in attending to a set of given problems which at first sight are not very attractive or interesting or fruitful, but will in the end break our wills and so teach us true joy. Might it not be that such a theology – a bit stiff, a bit formal at times, clumsy and gauche to the cultural élite – will turn out to be not just edifying for the church but also for the church's conversation partners?⁴⁰

³⁸ It is worth clarifying that Webster seems to be against Type 3 *per se*, and thinks that Ford's book is Type 3 done badly.

³⁹ Webster, *Review*, p553.

⁴⁰ Webster, *Review*, p559.

At the close of his review, Webster is posing the question of whether theology should be done according to Type 2/3 or Type 4/5. Clearly Webster sees this as an 'either/or' and takes the second option. Only if this is done, can theology be 'straight systematics' ('as though nothing had happened').

3.ii David Ford's Response

David Ford rightly recognises that the heart of Webster's critique is the question 'how ought Christian theology to be done?', and his response centres around this question.

Ford begins by setting out the themes which Webster would have addressed had he written the book which would qualify as a piece of 'straight systematics'. He also welcomes such a book. This already highlights a key difference between Webster's and Ford's understanding of theology – Ford's is much broader.⁴¹ However, Ford also rightly points out that other thinkers of the Type 4 approach often share a broader understanding of theology than Webster does. Ford notes that "Aquinas and Barth, for example, did not only comment on scripture and tradition: they daringly took on extraordinarily broad theological responsibilities in their situations".⁴² He continues: "Our task is not only to comment on what they and the rest of the tradition have said but also to do something analogous to what they did".⁴³ This brings Ford to the key question, that is, not to question whether or not Webster's approach is worthwhile (he takes this for granted), but to ask whether it is normative in a way that excludes other approaches. Ford argues that approaches to theology

⁴¹ Broader in the sense that it accommodates more than a single model, and probably more than a single purpose.

⁴² Ford, *Salvation*, p560.

⁴³ Ford, *Salvation*, p560.

should not be restricted to the 'either/or' alternatives which Webster appears to suggest.

Ford then considers what kind of theology it is that he offers in *Self and Salvation* (if it is not 'straight systematics'). His first point is that the book is 'one book in a series' – that of 'Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine'. This has two main effects. One is that it means that Ford does not have to worry about covering all aspects of systematic theology as many of the other books address core dogmatic themes. Secondly, and most importantly for our purposes, in being a book in a series, Ford had to agree to write it according to the brief that he was given. The series editors describe the aims thus:

The series aims to engage critically with the traditional doctrines of Christianity, and at the same time to locate and make sense of them within a secular context. Without losing sense of the authority of scripture and the traditions of the church, the books in this series will subject pertinent dogmas and creedal statements to careful scrutiny, analysing them in the light of both church and society, and will thereby practise theology in the fullest sense of the word.⁴⁴

These aims are of particular interest for two reasons. First, the books in this series seek to approach theology from the perspective outlined above: to reflect critically on Christian doctrine, tradition and history; and to engage critically with the social, cultural, and intellectual world in which we are living. And second, the book which is the subject of Chapter 3 is written according to the same brief.⁴⁵ This brief therefore describes a set of approaches to theology which is the concern of this thesis,⁴⁶ and also introduces in broad terms one of the core books upon which the thesis rests.

⁴⁴ Ford, *Salvation*, pp562-563. It might be worth adding that this is largely a circular consideration as it is Professor Daniel W. Hardy's vision which lies substantially behind the series!

⁴⁵ Alistair I. McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

⁴⁶ One of my supervisor's own books also appears in this series: Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Although very different from Ford's and McFadyen's books, Begbie's book definitely adheres to a set of approaches implied in the brief. To a large extent, Begbie puts into practice the kind of method being developed in this thesis.

Most of Ford's other points involve arguing for a broader conception of theology than that which is suggested by Webster (as well as arguing that Webster has misunderstood him in many cases). For example, Ford comments that his approach to theology is one type of architecture in the theological city, or, that his approach is a conversational theology based upon the premise that a God who relates to everyone and everything can have potentially unlimited questions and conversations. Ford then hones in on the core: "[Webster's] main worry seems to be that all those conversations lead away from focusing on the central truths [of Christianity]. An alternative view is that the central truths are such that they cry out to be related to the whole of reality and to every human being, with intensive conversation as one important way of doing this".⁴⁷

Ford's important distinction is not quite right. Webster's main worry is not that the conversations will lead away from focusing on the central truths of Christianity, although this is undoubtedly a worry for him, but that the conversations might determine the form and content of the central truths (Types 1 and 2).⁴⁸ However, Ford's point stands.

3.iii Reviewing the Webster/Ford Debate

David Ford's and John Webster's approaches to theology represent Frei's Types 3 and 4 respectively. Webster appears to be affirming that there is only one main way in which theology should be approached (by giving significant priority to Frei's second pole). His aim is to do 'straight systematics' with the implication that this should be done 'as though nothing had happened'. Whereas Ford's approach to

⁴⁷ Ford, *Salvation*, p567.

⁴⁸ It will become clear time and time again throughout the thesis that form and content cannot be separated. 'Form' refers to the shape and method which a theology adheres to, whereas 'content' identifies the material considerations of a theology.

theology is considerably broader. Ford acknowledges that Webster's position encapsulates a key, if not necessary, aspect of theology, but that it is by no means sufficient for theology. Instead theology benefits greatly from wider conversations, many of which may not be explicitly theological.

The key question underlying both the Webster/Ford debate as well as this thesis, is the extent to which Frei's first pole – culture/ secular discourse – should determine the form and content of Christian theology (both rightly take the second pole for granted). Webster clearly gives little weight to this, and would align himself with the theological tradition of which Karl Barth is a major exponent. Against Webster, it will be argued below that Barth offered a far greater place to secular discourse than is implied by Webster's position outlined here. Ford gives a much greater weight to Frei's first pole in determining the form and content of his theology, and in this respect may be closer to Paul Tillich than Barth. Although he remains keen to emphasise the uniqueness of Christianity, he is far less dogmatic in his approach. It will be argued below that Alistair McFadyen walks this tight-rope more convincingly than Ford. If, in broad terms, Webster's and Barth's work can be placed in Type 4, and Ford's in Type 3, it might be argued that McFadyen's work is to be located between Types 3 and 4. This, I will suggest, is how theology should be approached. In doing his theology between Types 3 and 4 McFadyen does indeed walk a tight-rope, and may on occasions fall on one side or other. However his position, which is the one that will be argued for in this thesis, does justice to both of the polar positions in a way which Webster's and Ford's do not. Webster gives insufficient place to secular discourse, and Ford overestimates the significance of secular discourse. This position does not have to be resolved by the 'either/or' that Webster implies. Rather, there is scope for a more multifaceted position that

maintains the strengths of both Webster's and Ford's positions, even though it is one that may be difficult to maintain consistently (hence McFadyen does fall off the tight-rope periodically).⁴⁹ The significance of Frei's typology and the Webster/Ford debate will be made clear in the following section.

4. The Concerns of this Thesis

The chapter began by considering Hans Frei's fivefold typology. This both set the concerns of this thesis in relation to its wider theological context and introduced some useful categories for describing various theological positions. Two positions were then developed in more detail – Types 3 and 4 – by referring to a recent debate between John Webster and David Ford. This debate helped raise some of the key issues of this thesis as well as introducing the polar positions. It is the purpose of this section to develop further the implications of Frei's typology and the Webster/Ford debate for the thesis. More specifically, some key terms will be set out and clarified, and the argument will be stated (although not supported).

David Ford (Type 3) and John Webster (Type 4) represent the polar positions of this thesis. Although highly indebted to Barth's approach, in terms of method Ford appears to be closer to Tillich's 'method of correlation' – that is, attempting to maintain the uniqueness of the truth of the Christian Gospel, and to reinterpret this truth in such a way that it is 'relevant' today.⁵⁰ Tillich writes of this in terms of explaining "the content of the Christian faith through existential questions and

⁴⁹ An allusion might be made to the difficulties in trinitarian theology of trying to maintain the balance between the One and Three, or the nature of the relation between Father, Son and Spirit.

⁵⁰ It is worth emphasising again that although also in Type 3, Ford's method is very different from Tillich's, functioning primarily from *ad hoc* correlations.

theological answers in mutual interdependence".⁵¹ By way of contrast, Webster is (admirably) concerned to do 'straight systematics' 'as though nothing had happened'. In this respect Webster's approach is closer to Barth's. As previously mentioned, Alistair McFadyen's work can be positioned somewhere between Types 3 and 4, and additionally this position is extremely difficult to maintain consistently.

One of the main ways in which McFadyen's position can be maintained is by making an important distinction between ultimate and operative primacy. Following the Webster/ Barth line, it will be argued that Frei's second pole must always have ultimate primacy. That is, God's self-revelation in Christ through the Spirit is necessarily the first and foundational concern. It is where the 'buck' stops. To this extent, theology is to be understood in terms of 'straight systematics'. However, given the ultimate priority of theology determined in this way, 'secular discourse' can adopt operative primacy at any particular point. Engagement with Frei's first pole – culture, secular discourse – is ultimately conditioned by the 'priority of God in theological method', but within this constraint it can have free reign. So for example, the theological anthropology explored below centres on an understanding of the self as relational. To explore and expound these relations, non-theological discourse may hold the fort but does not do so unconditionally. In other words, an account of human relations may be offered by the social sciences, but this account is ultimately to be interpreted from within a theological framework.

Most of the thesis will be discussed in terms of the distinction between ultimate and operative priority, and significant use will be made of the expression 'pressure of interpretation'. However, there is a danger that this might be understood in static terms. This is not the intention. As will be made clear in the Chapter 6

⁵¹ Tillich, *Volume I*, p68.

below, theology can remain true to its ultimate priority without referring to it at all. In this sense, it might be better to think in terms of a 'field of force' in which theology functions. Put differently, theology can function with integrity within its own theological framework whilst having space to manoeuvre (albeit within limits), and without having to refer explicitly to its ultimate priority or the pressure of interpretation deriving from it.⁵² This said, in the interest of clarity the more dynamic expression 'field of force' will have to give way.

Although I am arguing that McFadyen's position rests between Ford's and Webster's positions, my argument will be developed only in relation to Type 4 (Webster/ Barth). In part this is because of space restrictions, but more importantly, because Frei's second pole should hold ultimate primacy. As there is a tendency to fall off the tight-rope between Types 3 and 4, it is important to veer towards Type 4 rather than Type 3 as this does better justice to the uniqueness of the Christian message which I suggest is more important than being 'engaged'. If we have to fall off the tight-rope it should be on the side of Type 4. In this respect Webster is right. A dialogue with Type 4 should function as a useful check for the tight-rope walk, as well as giving ultimate priority to Frei's second pole. Therefore, the central concerns of this thesis will be developed through a dialogue between McFadyen's thought and Barth's.

The main concern of this thesis is more limited than Frei's polar positions or the references to culture mentioned above might suggest. The main distinction to be explored below is between theological and secular discourse. Some of the key aspects of this distinction can be clarified at the outset. Let me begin by offering a brief

⁵² Jeremy Begbie's book *Theology, Music and Time* might be a good example of theology conducted in this way.

definition of 'discourse' before exploring further what is meant by 'theological' and 'secular' discourse.

The word 'discourse' has been used widely in a number of academic disciplines, so much so that its meaning is often assumed and therefore left undefined. Traditionally, it has referred to a speech, lecture, written treatise or other forms of communication typically of a formal nature. This more narrow understanding of 'discourse' is still common place particularly in literary theory, semiotics and linguistics. More recently however, there has been an increasing proliferation of 'discourse about discourse' in the social sciences which means that whilst the narrower understanding remains, a significant number of people understand 'discourse' in much broader categories. Jacques Derrida, for instance, understands discourse as synonymous with the entire social system.⁵³ An even broader use of 'discourse' is evident in some contemporary 'discourse analysis' which now includes mass media such as advertising, film, and even the news.⁵⁴ In this regard, it might be best to think of 'discourse' in its broadest sense as 'the domain of communication'. Michel Foucault was perhaps the most significant thinker who helped broaden the meaning of 'discourse'. Foucault writes:

Instead of reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word 'discourse', I believe that I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements.⁵⁵

Within this statement, three key definitions can be identified.⁵⁶ First, the broadest understanding of discourse is apparent as 'the general domain of all

⁵³ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, London: Routledge, 1978, p280.

⁵⁴ Teun A. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse and Communication: New Approaches to the Analysis of Mass Media Discourse and Communication*, Berlin/ New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1985, Guy Cook, *The Discourse of Advertising*, London: Routledge, 1982.

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (trans.) Sheridan Smith, A. M., London: Tavistock, 1972, p80, cited in Sara Mills, *Discourse: The New Critical Idiom*, London: Routledge, 1997, p6.

⁵⁶ I am following Mills' analysis at this point (*Discourse*, p7).

statements'. In this regard, all utterances or texts which have meaning are understood as discourse. This definition has been developed at length by structuralists, post-structuralists and postmodernists in the direction we have already seen indicated by Jacques Derrida leading ultimately to include various 'media' as forms of 'discourse'.⁵⁷ Consequently, on the odd occasion when film is used as a point of comparison, this is the definition that is operative. The second definition – 'an individualizable group of statements' – refers to groups of utterances which seem to be regulated in some way and which seem to have a coherence and force in common. This is the kind of 'discourse' that will be referred to when writing of 'theological' and 'secular' discourse and will therefore be the dominant definition throughout the thesis. The third definition – 'a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements' – refers to the rules and structures that both produce and govern utterances and texts. Insofar as this thesis is concerned with the primary and operative criteria of theology, it is this form of 'discourse' to which reference is being made. Like most discourse theorists' work, all these definitions can be used interchangeably and overlaid on the other. However, it is to be emphasised that the second definition is dominant in the thesis barring the occasions just cited. It is now possible to define 'theological' and 'secular' discourse more precisely.

In this thesis, 'theological discourse' refers to any form of discourse that is explicitly theological (in the Christian tradition). Following from the discussion of 'discourse', this is a broad definition although it can be qualified in certain respects. In general terms, it refers to the kinds of discussions about the subject-matter of Christian theology which occurs in universities, colleges and churches around the

⁵⁷ In fact, the focus of Mills' book is to see "how Michel Foucault's ideas have been integrated into various disciplines in different ways" (*Discourse*, p10). See also David Howarth, *Discourse*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000.

world. Because of the diversity of approaches and content in theology, a precise meaning cannot be pinned down. However, certain key aspects can be identified.

First, 'theological discourse' is primarily discourse about the subject-matter of theology. This can take a number of forms which range from engagement with written texts, visual media, discussions, dialogues, seminars, lectures, sermons, conferences and so on. However, it is crucial to emphasise that it is the *subject-matter* of theology, that is the 'object' of theological discourse which is unique and sets theology as a discipline apart from 'secular discourse'. There is nothing inherent to theological language itself which sets it apart from secular discourse other than the unique nature of its object. It is quite possible, therefore, for theology to share much of the same language as other disciplines, but this is to be understood from within its own 'language-game' which in the case of theological discourse is to be determined by the object of theology. To put it another way, the same words may be used in both secular and theological language, albeit in ways that may only be analogically related.

Second, the core subject-matter (or object) of theology is ultimately 'God', particularly as revealed in Jesus Christ and to whom witness is borne in the Christian scriptures and the ensuing disputes giving rise to the creeds and Christian tradition. Given that we are dealing with the God of Christianity, having 'God' as the object of theology also involve a study of creation, humanity and other key doctrines which are understood to be central to the theological task.

Third, the practice of theology at the very least involves critical engagement with its key sources: the biblical texts, church history and tradition, and theological writings across the centuries. In addition to this core, it usually involves engagement with a far wider range of documents, sources, and disciplines. These disciplines include secular disciplines, some of which will be considered in more detail in the

following chapters. One key question which will be addressed at length below, is the extent to which God's self-revelation in Christ should determine the form and content of theology with respect to other potential sources of knowledge of God.

Fourth, the norms, rules and functions of theological discourse are shaped by its subject-matter and in this respect theology is like other discourses. However, as a form of 'discourse', there is an extent to which theology is also governed by the norms, rules and functions operating in other discourses *in addition* to being governed by its particular subject-matter. For our purposes this means that theology operates as an academic discipline, but that the subject-matter of theology retains ultimate priority at the expense of the other 'canons'. The point is that theological discourse does indeed operate according to norms, rules and functions which are shared with other disciplines (and in this respect is not unique), but unlike other forms of discourse, theological discourse can be disloyal to the norms, rules and functions of discourse if demanded by its own particular subject-matter. The object of theology retains ultimate priority.

By way of contrast, 'secular discourse' refers to any discourse which is not explicitly theological (both in the sense of not having the subject-matter of theology at the centre of its concerns, but also in the broader sense of theorising about religion and the transcendent). Perhaps even more so than 'theological discourse', 'secular discourse' in this sense rests upon the full range of definitions of 'discourse'. This thesis is concerned particularly with forms of academic discourse, especially the social sciences and philosophy, but hopefully will address in passing most significant forms of discourse whether academic or not. In this regard, both the arts and sciences will be referred to under the designator 'secular 'discourse' as well as the occasional use of more popular forms of discourse such as film.

It will be immediately apparent that this distinction cannot be maintained in a hard form. This will be an issue discussed at length throughout the thesis (in which the usefulness of the distinction will also become evident), but at the outset we can make two clarificatory points. First, the distinction cannot be maintained as neatly as is implied here. 'Secular discourse' has in the past often been defined by its relation to theological discourse, even if it is a relation of explicit antagonism. Many forms of secular discourse have arisen from explicit rejection of a theological framework (e.g. Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud). In this regard, secular discourse is heavily indebted to theological discourse even if the relation is one of antagonism. On the other hand, much secular discourse has also arisen with a strong debt to a Christian theological framework. Therefore, secular discourse can often contain either explicit or implicit theological (or even quasi-theological) assumptions. Just as there can be no 'pure' form of theological discourse which uses language not already learned in a secular context, most if not all forms of secular discourse are also loaded with metaphysical and quasi-theological assumptions. To highlight one of many possible examples, it has been argued plausibly that 'modern science' developed in large part because of a Christian heritage.⁵⁸ The Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* meant amongst other things that God was distinct from the world which gave considerable impetus to the development of scientific experimentation. Much of what the Greeks understood as science depended upon observation on account of the (quasi)divinity of creation. The point is that although I am making a hard distinction between theological and secular discourse, in many cases theological and non-theological thought are far more

⁵⁸ See Michael B. Foster, 'The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science', in *Mind*, 43, 1934, pp446-468; Reijer Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1972; Eugene M. Klaaren, *The Religious Origins of Modern Science: Belief in Creation in Seventeenth Century Thought*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977; Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998, p111f.

intertwined than is suggested here (perhaps especially in the use of analogical terms which are unavoidable for the theologian). The distinction is made to aid clarity of thought regarding theological method.

Second, within the thesis itself, this distinction requires further clarification. In many places 'theological discourse' refers to 'straight systematics' in the Webster sense. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the exposition of Barth. Barth's work is difficult to approach by distinguishing between theological and secular discourse because his concern is primarily with the extent to which all thought forms are determined by the Word of God – whether or not they are explicitly theological. In this respect, Barth epitomises the point that it is the peculiar object of theology which makes 'theological discourse' unique. Therefore, in the chapters on Barth, there are thinkers who are referred to as 'secular' because they are not theological in this narrow sense, even though they may be theological in a broader sense (i.e. that they are concerned with broadly theological issues and write from within a department of theology). One example of this might be Martin Buber, whose thought is undoubtedly theological in the broad sense although his thought is not 'straight systematics'. A better distinction for Barth may be between thought determined by the Word of God and thought that is not (which would certainly include much theology!). This clearly shifts the boundaries of theological and secular discourse and will be discussed further in later chapters. However, there remains significant scope for examining Barth's work with the distinction between theological and secular discourse in the broad sense defined above.

The specific concern of this thesis is to investigate the role of secular discourse in theological anthropology and the doctrine of sin. To some extent, the actual content is not significant for the investigation of theological method – that is

how secular discourse relates to theology. Although other areas of dogmatics might have been chosen for the study (theological ethics would also have been a good testing ground), theological anthropology and the doctrine of sin are especially good areas for investigation. It is important that the areas chosen are mainstream concerns for Christian dogmatics as well as areas to which secular discourse can contribute. Both of these conditions have to be met if the distinctive contribution theology can make to the academy is to become clear.

It will also be seen time and time again that form and content are inseparable. This means that it is not possible to consider theological method without at the same time considering the content of theology, if not actually 'doing' it. In this respect, the areas of dogmatics chosen for investigation are significant for the relation between theological and secular discourse. It may be that other areas could have been chosen, but *these* areas have their own distinctive contributions to make. For example, in terms of content, the doctrine of sin has a significant impact on theological method. Both McFadyen and Barth attempt to incorporate the 'brokenness' of human thinking brought about in large part by sin into their theology. Whether or not they are successful remains to be seen, but the present point is that issues of theological method are necessarily worked through in relation to specific content, and that specific content impinges upon theological method.

The central argument of the thesis is in order to be 'true to itself', it is crucial for theology to understand and reflect critically upon Christian doctrine, tradition and history on the one hand, and the social, cultural and intellectual world in which we are living on the other. One of the major ways in which this is facilitated is by engaging with secular discourse. However, it is also to be added quickly that this is not a necessary condition for theology, rather that account has to be taken of theology's

own locatedness and what this might mean. It will be argued that McFadyen's thought is to be understood as being in direct continuity with Barth's thought and that McFadyen has further developed Barth's basic orientation to secular discourse. More specifically, McFadyen is more willing to enter into dialogue with secular discourse than Barth, but the roots of this approach are evident in Barth. However, it will also be argued that (paradoxically) Barth takes secular discourse more seriously than McFadyen. In a number of places Barth engages critically and rigorously with a wide range of secular approaches whereas McFadyen's 'dialogue' is more limited. In his first book (Chapter 2 below) McFadyen effectively engages with one thinker whose thought happens to fit very well with the theological approach outlined. There is significant improvement in this regard in McFadyen's second book (Chapter 3 below), but McFadyen still does not engage with a sufficiently broad range of secular discourses to the extent that he ultimately offers a 'straw-man' argument. However, McFadyen's general approach is to be embraced with open arms. Both McFadyen's and Barth's work offer extremely rich grounds for testing the relation between theological and secular discourse.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to introduce the key themes, terms, and argument of the thesis. This was done first by setting the thesis within a broader theological context with Hans Frei's fivefold typology. Two positions which are to become the polar positions of this thesis were explored with reference to a recent debate between John Webster and David Ford. The core question at this point was about how theology ought to be done. Finally, the specific concerns of the thesis were introduced. The main concern was to investigate the role of secular discourse in

theological anthropology and the doctrine of sin using Alistair McFadyen's and Karl Barth's thought as the testing ground.

The main argument will be that in order to be 'true to itself', it is crucial for theology to understand and reflect critically upon Christian doctrine, tradition and history on the one hand, and the social, cultural and intellectual world in which we are living on the other. Additionally, one of the major ways in which this is facilitated is by engaging with secular discourse. It will also be argued that McFadyen's thought is to be understood to be in direct continuity with Barth's, although he extends Barth's basic line further. Although McFadyen is more willing to enter into dialogue with secular discourse than Barth, Barth takes it more seriously. In the final analysis, argument will be made for McFadyen's basic method with some qualification.

The thesis will continue by focusing in detail on the relation between theology and secular discourse first in McFadyen's anthropology (Chapter 2) and doctrine of sin (Chapter 3), and then Barth's anthropology (Chapter 4) and doctrine of sin (Chapter 5). Some conclusions will be drawn from their approaches which will then be stated in a more widely applicable form as in these (Chapter 6). A return to the terms of the Ford-Webster debate will also be included here. The aim is not only to explore theological method, but also to show that the method developed can be stated in a form applicable for other areas of theology.

CHAPTER 2

Secular Discourse in Alistair McFadyen's Theological Anthropology

1. Introduction

The primary task in this chapter is to examine the role of secular discourse in Alistair McFadyen's theological anthropology. This will be done by means of the secondary task, viz., explication of his theological anthropology. Broadly speaking, most of McFadyen's publications are centred around either theological anthropology or the doctrine of sin. For the most part McFadyen's earlier works focus on the former, and his more recent works on the latter. This chapter will consider McFadyen's theological anthropology concentrating predominantly on his first book, *The Call to Personhood*, but all of his publications concerned with theological anthropology will also be considered.¹ It was approximately 1993 when McFadyen's publications shifted from theological anthropology to the doctrine of sin.² These later works reveal an important development primarily in content but also in form. Consequently they will be considered in Chapter 3.

Before engaging in the primary task, it is worth highlighting two important influences on McFadyen's thought. The first is Karl Barth. Barth's thought can be

¹ Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 [hereafter *CTP*]; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'The Call to Discipleship: Reflections on Bonhoeffer's Theme 50 Years on', in *SJT*, 43, 1990, pp461-483; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'The Trinity and Human Individuality: The Conditions for Relevance', in *Theology*, 95, 1992, pp10-18; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'Truth as Mission: The Christian Claim to Universal Truth in a Pluralist Public World', in *SJT*, 46, 1993, pp437-456.

² 1993 does not represent a break in McFadyen's work, rather a general shift. There is of course strong continuity between his earlier and later works, the later often being dependent upon categories developed in the former.

seen to impact McFadyen's thinking at virtually every point, perhaps no where more clearly than in his methodology. Because one of the main tasks of the thesis is to compare McFadyen's and Barth's thought, no more will be said on this here. The other significant influence on McFadyen's thought is his former doctoral supervisor, Daniel Hardy. Hardy's approach to theology can be seen to under-gird McFadyen's thinking in a number of ways. In terms of form, it is probably fair to say that McFadyen's work lies in tension between Hardy's and Barth's approaches.³ That is, McFadyen is impressed by the Barthian emphasis on revelation and the methodological primacy of Christology as well as Hardy's concern to conduct theology through what David Ford calls 'the interplay of disciplines'.⁴ In terms of content, a number of key themes which are central to McFadyen's work are prefigured in Hardy's. Perhaps most importantly is the centrality of the Trinity understood in both dynamic and relational terms. In this regard, Hardy often describes God in terms of "a dynamic structured relationality" – a phrase which could easily have been written by McFadyen's hand.⁵ Other key themes which occur frequently in Hardy's work which are also evident in McFadyen's are: the emphasis on relationality and community, the importance of praise and worship (which is understood as the orientation of life to God), the 'ecology' of God and creation, ecclesiology and, of course, engagement or 'interweaving' with other disciplines.⁶

³ Notably this might also be argued for David Ford whose work carries some strong resemblances to McFadyen's, especially in terms of the Barthian influence combined with the desire for 'conversations' with other disciplines. Ford has also been heavily influenced personally by Daniel Hardy whilst teaching in Birmingham.

⁴ David F. Ford, 'Introduction: The Architecture of Life with God', in David F. Ford and Dennis Stamps (eds.), *Essentials of Christian Community: Essays for Daniel W. Hardy*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, p3.

⁵ Daniel W. Hardy, 'The Question of God in "God's Action in the World"', Consultation on Theology and Science, CTI, Princeton, 1994 (Unpublished), cited in 'Introduction: The Architecture of Life with God', p17.

⁶ See for instance: Daniel W. Hardy, 'Christ and Creation', in Thomas F. Torrance (ed.), *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381*, Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1981, pp88-110, Daniel W. Hardy and David F. Ford, *Jubilate: Theology in Praise*,

Having highlighted two key influences on McFadyen's theological development, we can now set out the structure of this chapter. We will begin by considering McFadyen's self-understanding of his task (method). We will then consider what McFadyen actually does by focusing on some key aspects of his anthropology (content). This will not be so much a summary of his anthropology as a review of the broad outlines or key loci of his thought. McFadyen's argument can get very detailed and at times a little opaque, and so it is by considering his overall structure, both as he intends it and as we read it, that we can see more clearly the role of secular discourse in his theological anthropology. Finally, we will focus specifically on the role of secular discourse in McFadyen's theological anthropology.

2. McFadyen on Method

Three of McFadyen's concerns which are crucial for revealing his understanding of his method can be identified early on in *The Call to Personhood*: the task of theology, the book's genesis, and its overall structure. These will be taken in turn.

1. McFadyen's understanding of the task of theology is crucial for understanding both the form and content of the bulk of his publications, and is also

London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984, Daniel W. Hardy, 'Created and Redeemed Sociality', in Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy (eds.), *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989, pp21-47, Daniel W. Hardy, 'God and the Form of Society', in Daniel W. Hardy and Peter H. Sedgwick (eds.), *The Weight of Glory: A Vision and Practice for Christian Theology. The Future of Liberal Theology: Essays for Peter Baelz*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991, pp131-144, Hardy and Sedgwick (eds.), *The Weight of Glory*, Daniel W. Hardy, 'The Future of Theology in a Complex World', in Hilary D. Regan and Alan J. Torrance (eds.), *Christ and Context: The Confrontation between Gospel and Culture*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993, pp21-42, Daniel W. Hardy, 'The Spirit of God in Creation and Reconciliation', in Hilary D. Regan and Alan J. Torrance (eds.), *Christ and Context: The Confrontation between Gospel and Culture*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993, pp237-258, and Daniel W. Hardy, 'A Magnificent Complexity: Letting God be God in Church, Society and Creation', in David F. Ford and Dennis Stamps (eds.), *Essentials of Christian Community: Essays for Daniel W. Hardy*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, pp307-356.

critical for the broader concern of this thesis. For these reasons I cite him at some length:

The theological task, in my understanding of it, has two poles: to understand and critically reflect upon Christian doctrine, tradition and history on the one hand, and the social, cultural and intellectual world in which we are living on the other. ... These are not two tasks but dual elements of a single task. Critical engagement with the world as a whole is an essential element of the theological task of formulating an understanding of Christian tradition and of the contemporary situation which illuminates Christian faith together with the world and thereby clarifies what responsible existence in it might mean.⁷

To put it another way, the very task of theology necessarily involves engaging with secular discourse. McFadyen rightly recognises both the need for critical reflection upon the 'deposit of faith', and also upon our situation. As 'dual elements of a single task', McFadyen also highlights the fact that all theology is necessarily a culturally embodied activity, and so it is an essential, if not the primary task of theology to engage critically with both of these poles.⁸ Although most theological reflection recognises the determinacy of the situation, it does not often take the step of engaging specifically with the second pole. McFadyen rightly argues that critical engagement with the contemporary situation, is not only an element of Christian theology, but that Christian theology is illuminated by engagement with secular discourse and helps clarify how we are to live responsibly in the contemporary situation. In short, engagement with secular discourse is not a choice for the theologian, it is part of the very process of doing theology.

McFadyen's distinctive contribution to theological method can be seen in his view that engagement with secular discourse illuminates Christian theology. This key element is clear in the background to *The Call to Personhood* and falls right at the

⁷ CTP, pp10-11.

⁸ It might have been helpful to have had some discussion from McFadyen about the position from which this is to be done. There is no 'neutral', or 'objective' position from which both poles can be critically assessed.

heart of his following book *Bound to Sin*.⁹ It is for this reason that McFadyen is prepared to, and indeed does take secular discourse seriously as part of the theological task. For McFadyen, this entails 'two rules of theological discourse', which again I quote in some length:

The *first* [Rule] represents the Barthian understanding of *the primacy of God in theological method* which has somehow to reflect and to retain the fact that God comes first and transcends all human reality. The *second* [Rule] is the understanding that, notwithstanding the primary orientation of theology on God alone, theology and theologians are *informed by their determinate situation* which constitutes, in part, a culturally specific way of going about and perceiving things. It is my belief and hope that accepting the socially determinate character of Christian faith and theology, and bringing their insights into *open dialogue with secular thought*, will lead to a mutually enriching encounter in which the perspectives of the participants, whilst never ceasing to be distinctively their own, are transformed and are brought into ever closer engagement with one another as we consider how we and our world are best to be understood and *responsibly transformed*.¹⁰

Although prepared to take secular discourse seriously, McFadyen is keen to avoid reducing theology to anthropology. Consequently, McFadyen's First Rule affirms unambiguously the (Barthian) priority of God in theological method. However, it is worth mentioning at this point that McFadyen does not explain exactly what is meant by the priority of God in theological method. At the very least McFadyen is referring to the general point that the pressure of interpretation moves from a theology determined by God's self-revelation to secular discourse. However, this could have a more specific reference, referring for instance to the priority of grace, of theological language, of the doctrine of God, Christology, and so on. McFadyen's Second Rule is more straightforward and recognises that the First Rule cannot be applied apart from within a determinate, or culturally embodied situation. In short, McFadyen's First and Second Rules are, for him, necessary but insufficient conditions for the theological task.

⁹ Alistair I. McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

¹⁰ CTP, p12 (my italics).

These Rules clearly have important implications for McFadyen's method in which he wants to bring theology into 'open dialogue' with secular thought. McFadyen intends a 'dialogue' such that the distinctive contributions of both theology and secular thought are maintained and taken seriously on their own terms (i.e. from within their own frameworks of understanding), but also that they can be mutually enriching. Theology can learn from secular discourse and secular discourse can learn from theology. Again the distinctness of McFadyen's approach is clear. He does not want to subsume secular discourse within theology, nor does he want to 'accommodate' the Christian faith to contemporary culture.¹¹ Rather, the keeping of McFadyen's two Rules will ensure that theology is done responsibly *within* culture, without being responsible *to* culture. In other words, theology is done with a critical awareness of secular discourse, but the operative criteria for theology are determined by the Christian faith not secular discourse.¹² It is McFadyen's concern for the responsible transformation of the world that leads to the second aspect of McFadyen's understanding of his method.

2. From the outset McFadyen emphasises both that the genesis of the book arises from his own experience of nursing in a psychiatric hospital, and that his concern throughout is with practice.¹³ The book has a practical root and is ultimately

¹¹ And so McFadyen does not fall into either of the two polar positions of H. Richard Niebuhr's well-known typology (H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, New York: Harper Torch Books, 1975).

¹² "What I intend, therefore, is not simply a new recourse to traditional Christian apologetics, and much less is it a simple recourse to a Barthian form of Dogmatic theology. I am more willing to take the risks of a meaningful and open dialogue with non-Christian thought than the latter would allow. As regards the former, I am not seeking to justify to non-Christians conclusions reached within the circle of faith through independent theological reflection by dressing them up in the language of secular thought." (CTP, pp11-12).

¹³ McFadyen's concern with praxis is not exclusive to his early works. In many ways, it is not until he develops his doctrine of sin that the practical relevance of his anthropology becomes clear. See: Alistair I. McFadyen, with Helga Hanks, and Cath Adams, 'Ritual Abuse: A Definition', in *Child Abuse Review*, 2/1. 1993, pp35-41; Alistair I. McFadyen, with David F. Ford, 'Praise', in Peter Sedgwick, (ed.), *God in the City*, London: Mowbray, 1995, pp95-104; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'Crime

intended to have some kind of practical application. McFadyen's theological interest in 'what it is to be a person' (cf. Rule 1) arose from an actual situation in which he was confronted by 'what it is to be a person' (cf. Rule 2). Put differently, McFadyen's concern with practice is a concern to engage with the world and for this reason has significant implications for the 'theology of culture'. This of course ties in well with McFadyen's 'basic premise' that: "We become the people we are through our relationships with others".¹⁴ At this point it becomes clear that the content is to have an important bearing on the form and also our broader concern for the relation between secular discourse and the theology.

McFadyen's theological concern to answer 'some very basic questions' – "What is a person? What is individual identity, and where does it come from? What makes us the people we are?" – arises from practical experience and is intended to influence the way we live. These questions are to be answered through an 'open dialogue' with secular thought.¹⁵ Thus, at the very heart of McFadyen's agenda, lies a connection between the two Rules, and also between 'theory' and 'practice'. To put it another way, the content ('we become the people we are through our relationships with others') necessarily determines the form of the argument (the relation between Rule 1 and Rule 2), and at the same time, the form (the relation between Rule 1 and Rule 2) is to determine the nature of the content ('we become the people we are through our relationships with others'). In trying to make sense of the various dimensions of personal existence – "the psychological, the social, the interpersonal,

and Violence: The UPA as the Place of Demons?', in Peter Sedgwick, (ed.), *God in the City*, London: Mowbray, 1995, pp178-190; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'The Abuse of the Family', in Hugh S. Pyper, (ed.), *The Christian Family: A Concept in Crisis*, Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1996, pp102-117; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'Healing the Damaged', in David F. Ford, and Dennis Stamps, (eds.), *Essentials of Christian Community*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, pp91-103.

¹⁴ CTP, pxi.

¹⁵ CTP, p1.

the material, the political, the institutional, the technical and the spiritual”¹⁶ – McFadyen necessarily ties Rules 1 and 2 together, as well as theory and practice. It therefore comes as no surprise that the epilogue to an otherwise largely theoretical book seeks to “step further into the conceptuality I have been developing by exploring some of the ways in which it might be brought to bear on practical situations... [and for readers] to find their own ways out of this theoretical interlude back into their own practical situations and continue their way of conceiving person and community there”.¹⁷

Theological anthropology as McFadyen intends to develop it, is therefore inextricably connected to secular discourse. For McFadyen’s argument, ‘what it is to be a person’, can only be answered by attending to both theological and secular thought. The theological contribution is necessary because a secular account of personhood is inadequate, lacking an understanding of what it is to be a creature before God. This aspect will come through particularly clearly in Karl Barth’s anthropology in Chapter 4 below, but McFadyen also argues that personhood is primarily a theological category. However, most theological accounts of personhood assume that it is legitimate to move immediately from relational concepts of the Trinity to human personhood. These positions often overlook the question of how one moves from divine to human relations, and furthermore, rarely develop human relations with reference to sociological accounts.¹⁸ The result is often a relational theological anthropology that has taken insufficient account of the actual relations through which persons are constituted, most notably institutional relations. By way of contrast, the content of McFadyen’s theological anthropology means that his

¹⁶ *CTP*, p2.

¹⁷ *CTP*, p271.

¹⁸ One of McFadyen’s great strengths is that he unambiguously avoids both traps. See *CTP*, and esp. McFadyen, ‘The Trinity and Human Individuality’.

argument takes the form of both theological and secular accounts. In short, because he takes account of both theological and secular theories, his anthropology is more developed than many other relational anthropologies. We turn now more directly to his method.

3. The overall structure of *The Call to Personhood* clearly demonstrates both McFadyen's understanding of the task of theology, and his desire to have his 'theory' connect with 'practice'. It also indicates the way in which McFadyen intends secular discourse to interact with theology. The book is divided into four parts. In Part I, McFadyen considers persons in relation to God. Consequently, he lays out his basic theological axioms: a doctrine of the Trinity conceived in terms of inter-personal relations, and an understanding of call as central to redemption. Part II focuses on social relations, or the socio-psychological aspects of personhood by drawing from the work in psychology and philosophy of science of Rom Harré. In short, persons are formed by the 'sedimentations' of their relationships. Part III turns more directly to interpersonal relations, that is, how persons are redeemed through relationships in a process of 'recontextualisation', and Part IV considers the role of political relations or institutions in constituting personhood.

McFadyen is keen to stress that his theology and social thought have developed in intrinsic interrelation and have been mutually informative.¹⁹ McFadyen's Rules 1 and 2 are indeed intended to be part of a single task. Although Part I is the most exclusively theological, it is informed by the social thought following it. Similarly, Part II, which is probably the least explicitly theological, is intrinsically theological as are Parts III and IV. The latter parts are intended, in part,

¹⁹ This is of course true more widely as stated in Chapter 1 above.

to clarify and develop the theological position set out in Part I. As such, the structure of the book is to take the form of a dialogue between theological and secular thought. This again is tied to the content, in two ways.

First, McFadyen's "basic conception of the person in this discussion is both dialogical (formed through social interaction, through address and response) and dialectical (never coming to a rest in a final unity, if only because one is never removed from relation)".²⁰ In regard to content, this enables McFadyen to develop his understanding of personhood as relational subjects of communication which makes it impossible to think of persons as having a clearly defined 'centre'. In regard to method, there is similarly no straightforward centre, rather a dialogue and dialectical interaction between two forms of discourse: theological and secular. As a dialogue, both forms of discourse can be mutually informative and critical of the other, as well as maintaining their own distinctness.²¹ As dialectic, there is an ongoing dialogue between theological and secular discourses because they will not come to a final resolution. Because of the dialogical interplay of the dialectic, McFadyen describes his central themes as 'interweaving'. This means that it is not possible to identify an all-embracing centre to McFadyen's anthropology. Rather, the key elements have to be identified in the acknowledgement that it is in the interweaving of these themes, the constant dialogical interplay of the dialectic, that a gradual picture can emerge.

Secondly, McFadyen's aim in the book is to steer "something of a mid-course between individualism and collectivism, which can do justice to personal freedom and

²⁰ CTP, p9.

²¹ There may be forms of theological and secular discourse that are simply incommensurable. That is, the distinction between theology and some forms of secular discourse may be so vehement and in explicit antagonism to each other that there is simply no possibility for dialogue. McFadyen does not mention this possibility but it is important to recognise that it might not always be possible for a 'mutually illuminating dialogue'.

autonomy whilst simultaneously acknowledging the role of social relations and institutions".²² It is precisely his attempt to construct a 'third option' that leads him to engage with secular discourse. From the outset, McFadyen acknowledges his indebtedness to social philosophy which would normally fall beyond the bounds of many theological discussions, but this engagement is a direct result of his attempting to construct a 'third option'. Again this means that McFadyen necessarily engages with secular discourse because of his content and so his content informs his method, but his method – that of engaging with secular discourse – also necessarily informs his content. Form and content cannot be separated. Hence, my primary aim (to examine McFadyen's use of secular discourse in his theological anthropology) can only be done with recourse to the secondary aim (explication of his theological anthropology). It is to the secondary aim that we now direct our attention.

3. *McFadyen's Content*

It is clear by now that McFadyen intends to engage with secular discourse as part of his theological task, and that this is necessary given his intended content, but we will now consider what McFadyen actually does. Does he successfully integrate theological and secular discourse, maintain Rules 1 and 2, as he intends? More to the point, how does McFadyen actually integrate theological and secular discourse? To what extent is his dialogue a 'genuine' dialogue?

In this section, I intend to identify the key streams of McFadyen's thought that 'interweave' forming his 'content'. As stated above, this is not so much a summary of his anthropology, although to some extent it is this by necessity, as a review of the broad outlines of his thought so that the interaction between theological and secular

²² CTP, p5. See also p224.

discourse will become more apparent. In doing this I will follow McFadyen's structure but try to identify the key loci functioning in each part rather than giving a straightforward summary of the parts. This will be done with an eye open to the way theological and secular discourse interacts throughout the book.

3.i Persons in Relation to God

Two key theological axioms can be identified in McFadyen's thought: human existence in the image of the trinitarian God,²³ and the normativity of the call of Christ for personal identity.²⁴ In developing both axioms, McFadyen also places some of the central concepts of the book into a theological setting, and further, suggests that this is the most adequate way of doing justice to personhood. In short, secular accounts of personhood are inadequate on their own. McFadyen's 'basic position' is that persons have to be understood in social terms, that is, they are somehow the product of their relations, both vertically and horizontally. It is in developing this basic argument that a theological approach is outlined centring around these two axioms which will now be considered in their respective order.

1. McFadyen develops his understanding of human beings as relational by developing the theological concept of human existence in the image of the trinitarian God. He begins by making a distinction between the vertical image, the constitution of human beings through relation to God, and the horizontal image, the constitution of human beings in the sphere of human relations. Both the vertical and horizontal

²³ CTP, Chapter 1; McFadyen, 'The Trinity and Human Individuality'.

²⁴ CTP, Chapter 2; McFadyen, 'The Call to Discipleship'; McFadyen, 'Truth as Mission'.

images are developed through some fundamental categories which are important for the book as a whole.

A 'personal relationship' is defined by McFadyen as: "an encounter between two or more partners who are different, who have some independence and autonomy in the relation and who may therefore engage with each other on the basis of freedom rather than coercion. ... [A] personal relation is one characterised by the call and response, the gift and return of dialogue".²⁵ The two key expressions here are 'call and response' and 'dialogue', which in one way or another undergirds the relational structure of personhood throughout the book.

In relation to the vertical image, thanks and praise are thought to be the appropriate response to God's creative, sustaining, and redemptive activity. In providing space for free human response to the divine address, human being is intended to be God's dialogue-partner. Consequently, human being is to be described as 'being-in-partnership' with God. Human being as dialogue-partner is emphatically not a static conception, but an active response to an external address and therefore an ongoing communication in dialogical form. This dynamic is to be understood in terms of grace. That is, from God's side there is respect for freedom and independence and an absence of over-determination or coercion. However, in creating the possibility of a free response of thanksgiving, there is also the possibility of misunderstanding, wrong orientation, and therefore a corrupt or distorted response. In the very structure of freedom given in the divine intention for dialogue-partnership, there is therefore the possibility of distortion. This means that the image of God can be corrupted or distorted, but not lost. It is an ontological structure of human being.

²⁵ CTP, pp18-19.

The ontological structure of freedom is the necessary (but insufficient) condition for human response to God's address, and it is the making of such a response that is fundamental to personhood. McFadyen writes: "When grace (the determination of the relation from God's side) is met with thanksgiving (the responding acceptance of this determination on the human side), then human life has an undistorted structure".²⁶ Put another way, as an ontological statement about the constitution of human being, it is important to attend to the kind or quality of relations. McFadyen argues that the appropriate response to God's Word is a 'being-in-gratitude' which constitutes the vertical image. Although this may be the 'right' response, human beings are free not to respond and therefore not to answer the call to be God's dialogue-partners. In such cases, human beings remain in relation to God but in a fundamentally distorted way. As McFadyen puts it: "the form of God's address determines the structure of human being as response without determining the form or content of that response".²⁷ In McFadyen's thinking, as God's address constitutes the ontological structure of human being as relational, and for McFadyen the vertical image is primary, this means that accounts of personhood that do not take into consideration theological discourse are fundamentally inadequate. This too is why McFadyen places the theological account at the beginning so that the primacy of God is maintained in theological method (theocentric theology), and theological anthropology is in less danger of talk of humanity replacing talk of God (anthropocentric theology).

In relation to the horizontal image, the divine image remains first and foremost a theological term not an anthropological term even though it is to apply to the social refraction of the history of response. Put differently, to understand the form of social

²⁶ CTP, p21.

²⁷ CTP, p22.

beings imaging God (*analogatum*), McFadyen starts by enquiring about the God who is reflected in human form (*analogans*).²⁸ This God is of course the trinitarian God.

McFadyen proposes an orthodox understanding of the Trinity as “a unique community of Persons in which Person and relation are independent moments in a process of mutuality”.²⁹ The Father, Son, and Spirit are Persons in relation and Persons only through relation. They are only Persons insofar as they exist in and for others. Consequently, ‘personal identity’ refers to “the communicative form (the stance in relations; the form taken in call and response) which a person habitually takes and which endures through a plurality of relations within which personal being is both given and received”.³⁰ The identity of the Persons of the Trinity depends upon the Persons’ incommunicable Personalities, that is, the unique pattern of communication which establishes the individual and non-exchangeable nature of each person such that one is not reducible to the character of the relations between the Persons. The Persons of the Trinity both share the divine nature and have their particular unique identities existing as Persons only in relation. They are Persons only insofar as they are related, but are distinct from one-another and are not reducible to one or the totality of their relations.³¹ It is the orientation toward the other, living beyond one’s borders, and a radical openness to and for one another which constitutes personal existence in this unique community. In short: “personal identity and

²⁸ Again I emphasise that McFadyen avoids a methodological flaw (postulating a direct correlation between divine and human personhood) which characterises many relational anthropologies which he outlines in ‘The Trinity and Human Individuality’.

²⁹ CTP, p27.

³⁰ CTP, p27.

³¹ Contra Harriet A. Harris, ‘Should we say that Personhood is Relational?’, in *SJT*, 51/2, 1998, pp214-234, in which Harris takes issue with the implication in McFadyen’s thought that persons are reducible to their relations. McFadyen explicitly negates this: “Persons are a manifestation of their relations, formed through though not simply reducible to them” (CTP, p40).

individuality are neither asocial nor presocial, but arise out of one's relations and community with others".³²

The structure of the Trinity is not only open with regard to the internal relations but also the external relations, that is, towards creation. Through the trinitarian history of creation-redemption human beings are drawn into a form of life which is a creaturely reflection of the trinitarian God. Therefore, "[j]ust as the Persons of the Trinity receive and maintain their identities through relation, and relations of a certain quality, then so would human persons only receive and maintain their identities through relation with others and would stand fully in God's image whenever these identities and relations achieved a certain quality".³³ The image of God is therefore to be conceived in relational terms.

The key notion here, adding to the earlier categories of 'call and response' and 'dialogue', is 'mutuality'. All three categories are used to explicate the horizontal image more fully, mainly through male and female relations, but also marriage, family, and fall-redemption. Sexual differentiation is considered as a paradigm for humanity and points to the fact that God intends both distinction and relation in God's image. Humanity is only fully in the image of God where it is lived in dialogical encounter, call and response, and reciprocal mutuality. As such it is diachronic (proceeding through time), dialectical (does not overcome difference, never coming to a final unity), and dialogical (a relation of mutuality and reciprocity). The image refers to the form of relation and not any specific medium or content of it.

As the image is construed in relational terms, the structure of human and personal being can be seen to be ex-centric, that is, persons are orientated on

³² CTP, p29.

³³ CTP, p31.

themselves or 'centred' by moving towards the reality of others.³⁴ In short, human being "is defined by the form of its response to God's offer of dialogue partnership".³⁵ The doctrine of original sin means that instead of entering into free and thankful relation with God we have become orientated upon ourselves and are therefore in God's image in a distorted way and consequently also relate to ourselves in a distorted way.

2. McFadyen's second theological axiom is the call to discipleship or the call of Christ. Although the call-response dynamic was important in the previous section, McFadyen now develops it more fully Christologically. As the Word of God, Jesus Christ is God's redemptive address to humankind. But he is also the perfect human response to that address from the human side. To put it another way, it is in Jesus Christ that God's call and proper human response coincide, and as such, Christ is the enacting of the image in its fullness. Therefore, "[t]o be fully in God's image, to make a right response to God and others, is... to be conformed to Christ".³⁶ 'Conformity to Christ' is, for McFadyen, another key category for personhood. Christ is the paradigmatic form of God's redemptive address, and also the paradigm of the intended form of response, and so, it is by conforming to Christ that our relationships are properly structured. This basic position is unpacked by McFadyen in a number of ways.

First, McFadyen considers the original calling of the disciples by Christ. The call individualises them by forcing them to 'stand out' from their present context, and

³⁴ Cf. John Zizioulas who writes: "personhood implies the 'openness of being', and even more than that, the *ek-stasis* of being, i.e. a movement towards communion which leads to a transcendence of the boundaries of the 'self' and thus to *freedom*" (John D. Zizioulas, 'Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood', *SJT*, 1975, p408).

³⁵ *CTP*, p44.

³⁶ *CTP*, p47.

to this extent they are 'decontextualised'. The disciples are removed from their relational and social context. But they are then 'reconstituted' as new individuals as they are incorporated into a different relation and relational context. The emphasis is therefore placed on the recontextualisation in response to an external address (call).³⁷ It is the call of Jesus that reconstitutes the disciples as new individuals, and not the linear development of their previous identities. They are transformed in the creative power of the call.

Second, the call comes to and transforms concrete persons. The old identity is involved, and is somehow still recognisable, but there is a transformed orientation, a reconstituted identity empowered by an external address. Consequently, there is discontinuity between the old and the new, but not to the extent that there is a completely new beginning, as well as continuity in that the new is a transformation of the old. The old endures in a transformed way.

Third, the call shatters all claims to independence and self-orientation. The disciples self-orientation has been displaced by orientation to Christ. They were empowered through the Holy Spirit for this new orientation, and so were no longer dependent upon their own resources.

And fourth:

Individuality is reconstituted in this response [to the call] through a recontextualisation in which the relation with God (the God context) becomes absolutely determinative. It is a recontextualisation in a double sense, then: as one is placed in the context of God's redemptive communication one receives a new orientation in one's social context, and so a new form of communicative subjectivity, a new way of being in relations.³⁸

All this is to say that discipleship means orientation out of oneself in the service of others. Consequently, "[a] properly orientated individuality and a

³⁷ McFadyen's position here is not dissimilar from Miroslav Volf's dynamic of 'exclusion and embrace', or more specifically the receiving of the self of a 'new centre' which is actually a de-centred centre. See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996, Chapters II and III, esp. pp69-71.

³⁸ CTP, p56.

genuinely responding relation must be thought of in Christian terms as conformity to, and the presence of, Christ".³⁹ It is only in conforming to Christ that our relations take on an undistorted character. A relation is conformed to Christ insofar as Christ is present in it, that is when it tends towards an undistorted dialogical structure of call and response. It is in and through this dialogical relatedness that the partners are properly structured and conform to Christ. Conformity to Christ, therefore, concerns both elements of being-in-relation, that is, individuality and relation.

McFadyen's second axiom – the call to discipleship or the call to Christ – develops some of the categories of the first axiom: dialogue, mutuality, and especially call and response. This dynamic is thought through Christologically taking Christ's call of the disciples as the paradigm. The call of Christ 'recontextualises' the disciples' relational nexus as they are conformed to Christ. 'Conformity to Christ' becomes a key category which structures properly constituted relations and therefore persons.

McFadyen's argument opens by setting out a theological framework for understanding personhood. The placing of the most explicitly theological section of the book at the beginning suggests that McFadyen thus far is keeping Rule 1, the priority of God in theological method. Furthermore, the form of his argument (method) is necessitated by his understanding of the ontological structure of human being determined by the form of God's address (content). This leads McFadyen to develop four main categories, to which a fifth will be added shortly. These four categories can be summarised as the dynamic of call and response; dialectical dialogue, reciprocal mutuality; and conformity to Christ. The fifth category, which

³⁹ CTP, p58.

will be developed in the next section, is the process of 'sedimentation'. All of these categories also 'interweave' and are thereby closely connected. What is important to note at this stage is that they have been developed primarily on the basis of a theological approach, and will be worked through in relation to secular discourses. It is to this aspect that we now turn.

3.ii Social Relations

McFadyen's main concern in the book is to conceive of personhood in social and communicative terms. We have already considered the theological axioms undergirding this aim, and so we now follow McFadyen as he focuses on *how* persons are formed. In doing this, McFadyen looks at the social context which determines the way in which persons enter into frameworks of communication, which in turn order the pattern of relations from which personal identity is 'sedimented'. These 'neutral' structures which constitute personhood are ontological.⁴⁰

McFadyen's basic position is that "individuals are formed through social processes, their identities sedimented from histories of significant relation".⁴¹ Put another way, social relations take place within a given social context, and so personal identity is bound to the societal structures which constitute the relational nexus. Interpersonal exchanges are therefore conducted according to a social code, a semantic system. The recognition that personhood is dependent upon both the wider social network and individual relations is to be developed primarily on the basis of secular discourse, in this case the psychology and philosophy of science of Rom

⁴⁰ McFadyen wrongly calls these structures 'neutral' (CTP, p71), on the basis that distorted and undistorted relations may occur. If these ontological structures are the processes through which personhood is constituted, they are anything but neutral, rather, they are ambiguous.

⁴¹ CTP, p72.

Harré. McFadyen's Rule 2 (critical engagement with the determinate situation) is now coming to the fore. He has sketched some key facets of personhood on the basis of a theological framework, which are now to be explored by taking secular discourse seriously on its own terms, i.e., without imposing a procrustean theological framework on them. He allows non-Christian discourses their own voice. McFadyen identifies some key structures on the basis of Harré's work which we now briefly summarise.

1. A person is socially and physically embodied. The basis for a person to be a responsible subject of communication is that he/she recognise themselves to be a singular, unified self. This self-recognition of themselves as persons is secondary and derives from public recognition which is primary. It is primarily through a public structure that a person is recognised as a potential subject of and locus for communication. Persons are publicly recognisable as distinct and continuous locations, and therefore afforded a public identity by virtue of the fact of their embodiment in the physical and social dimensions of the public sphere. Public embodiment (socially and physically) and public recognition are the primary sources of personal identity. In short: "The fact of this embodiment in both dimensions of the public world as a unique point location, and its consequent recognition by others in communication and relation with one, together constitute the source of the understanding of one's identity as distinct and personal, and for the particular and unique character of identity".⁴²

The possibility of communication is founded upon the physical world, but the communication itself upon the social world. More specifically, the body is an

⁴² CTP, p77.

important element in public recognition of personal identity (the physical world), but individuals are constituted as persons through social processes of communication and exchange (the social world), not physical processes. In other words, the body is a crucial aspect of personal identity, but identity cannot be reduced to the body, nor can the body be understood in static terms. Rather, the body itself has a communicative dynamic and the person is formed through communication and relation. 'Personal identity' "denotes the way in which one enters communication and relates to others".⁴³ Persons are founded upon physical embodiment but are primarily social.

2. Persons can be located in space time by using two 'locating grids': physical space-time and social space-time. Both grids are important and used together, they map the co-ordination of persons and the content of their communication. This is done primarily through the use of indices which locate the communication both in physical space-time ('here', 'there', 'then', 'now', 'next'), and in social space-time (personal pronouns). The former relates to spatio-temporal location of the body, and the latter to socio-psychological phenomena which constitute personal and social life. These grids must be anchored by a particular location, in these cases the 'I', but can also be located by proper names which are publicly identifiable. However, use of proper names only indicates competence in the procedures for public identification of persons, whereas use of a pronoun indicates a more generalised communicative competence – to contribute to and participate in social communication. In the second case, the 'I' has the ability to locate others spatio-temporal location and their inter-communication. Put simply, one 'body-in-motion' has recognised another 'body-in-motion' as a potential interlocutor. The 'I' has become a subject of communication.

⁴³ CTP, p78.

3. Communication processes are conducted through a determinate but relative social code. There are various ground rules, often implicit, which structure or codify the relation by indicating the socially valid ways in which the 'I' can be indexed, i.e., when it is appropriate for 'me' to be the subject, object or referent of communication, and also what the appropriate content of the communication may be.⁴⁴ For example, a different social code governs the way I relate to my wife, colleagues, bank manager, shop assistant, and so on, both physically and temporally. Access to social space-time in a local context will have different rules regulating what may or may not be appropriate. In short: "These social codes determine when, where and how, in relation to others and to their communication, a person may be recognised and expected as a contributor to social interaction".⁴⁵

The social world is structured through interpersonal communication. This means that social codes arise from previous personal communications, but also that they structure such communications: "persons and the social structures and processes through which they are formed must be considered as codetermining and ontologically coincident realities".⁴⁶ In addition to this (primary) social structure, a secondary structure can also be identified. This second structure constitutes the specific way in which a particular society is ordered: the regulation, distribution, and organisation of labour; social status; and internal psychological structures which regulate a person's communication. The primary structure identifies persons as simple locations, but it is through the secondary structure that persons acquire a psychological structure which reflects the way in which the social world is structured enabling interaction with it.

⁴⁴ CTP, p83.

⁴⁵ CTP, p84.

⁴⁶ CTP, p85.

These structures have significant implications for the understanding of the 'self'. First, the self is essentially a public structure. By this McFadyen means that "the internal structure of persons (a psychological complex of 'self') which organises a person's communication is primarily a public structure and only secondarily appropriated by individuals as a private psychological complex".⁴⁷ Second, the public structures which constitute personal identity are privately appropriated through 'personal centring' (a person's sense of identity). There is no personal core to the self, rather, personal centring is enabled by holding a belief or theory about oneself through which experience, communication, self-control, and responsibility become possible. Such a belief is also socially acquired primarily through the use of language (especially personal pronouns). The locating grids of physical and social space-time, in which the world is referred to oneself, are crucial factors for personal centring.

Third, selfhood is an organisational process. It is therefore, not some kind of quasi-possession, rather, a theory which people have about themselves which facilitates personal existence. "The self", in McFadyen's words, "is an hypothesis used to refer to the organisational properties of an underlying ordered structure of which there is and can be no direct empirical experience".⁴⁸ This leads to a 'distance' between two aspects of selfhood. On the one hand, the 'underlying ordered structure' of the self is deeply embedded and removed from particular relations, what McFadyen calls the 'deep self'. The deep self is a transcendent point of unity behind a number of lower-level selves. On the other hand, a model of the self is generated by the deep self, which structures and organises communication and experience in a particular context. This is the 'practical' or 'local self'.

⁴⁷ CTP, p90.

⁴⁸ CTP, p100.

All of the structures outlined above, and the resulting implications for an understanding of selfhood, can be centred around one guiding concept which can be added to the previous four categories of the dynamic of call and response; dialectical dialogue, reciprocal mutuality; and conformity to Christ. The fifth category is the process of 'sedimentation'. Having considered the social relations through which persons are constituted, what McFadyen calls the process of 'sedimentation' should be reasonably clear without much description. As with the earlier four categories, the process of sedimentation can be seen to under-gird loosely much of the above discussion, but is rarely explicitly formulated.

'Sedimentation' can be described as "[t]he process whereby personal identity [the unique way of being and relating to an individual person] is accumulated through a significant history of address and response which has flowed around a particular point location and gathered around it in a unique way, so structuring a uniquely centred personal identity".⁴⁹ In other words, person is not a circumscribable, static, self-contained object, rather, person is a dynamic category, an organisational centre, which is built up and changes over time. Identity is that aspect of a person which is 'settled' or 'deposited' through a history of significant relations. It is a sedimented history of response which endures through time.

In summary, using Harré's psychology and philosophy of science (secular discourse), McFadyen charts some physical and social structures through which relations are conducted. These structures lead to an understanding of the self which is essentially a public structure where one's sense of self is determined through personal

⁴⁹ CTP, p318.

or internal centring. As such, the self is an organisational process centring around a personal core.

These social relations or structures are guided by sedimentation – the process in which personal identity is constituted through significant histories of call and response. Sedimentation is a further category which can be added to the dynamic of call and response, dialectical dialogue, reciprocal mutuality and conformity to Christ, all of which are crucial loci for identifying and describing the self. These categories transcend both the theological and secular approaches from which they originated, as they are equally applicable in both kinds of discourse.

Thus far, McFadyen has remained true to Rules 1 and 2: the primacy of God in theological method and critical engagement with the determinate situation. The first two parts correspond to these Rules, Part I being predominantly theological, and Part II predominately secular. Rules 1 and 2 work together but in separate ways at this stage. Part I offers an essentially theological account of personhood as constituted by relations, and Part II offers a non-theological account of the structure of relations primarily from a psycho-social perspective. In other words, Rules 1 and 2 complement each other and describe important dimensions of personhood, but are not yet integrated in 'dialogue'. The only obviously 'dialogical' material at this point are the five categories which highlight key aspects of personhood which shape both form and content. It is only in the next section that McFadyen begins to integrate Rules 1 and 2 more fully and hence enter into a more genuine dialogue.

3.iii Interpersonal Relations

McFadyen's concern here is to offer an account of how persons are redeemed in their relationships, primarily through the process of 'recontextualisation'. That is, McFadyen considers the modification that social relationships undergo when approached through the transformation that is brought about in relation to God. As human relations with God are reconstituted through Christ, so are horizontal relations. Redemption provides a new framework of meaning, but it is one that takes place within the already existing frameworks in the social world. However, it transforms and relativises social frameworks by providing a more significant context of communication. "Redemption", according to McFadyen, "is a *recontextualisation* which brings a person into a new community with a redeemed pattern of intersubjectivity".⁵⁰

All of the five categories: the dynamic of call and response, dialectical dialogue, reciprocal mutuality, conformity to Christ, and sedimentation are now crucial for the interweaving of the theological and secular poles (Rules 1 and 2) in an account of redeemed relations.

As we have seen, McFadyen identifies the form of properly constituted relations as dialogue. Dialogue "is the undistorted form of relation through which undistorted personal identities may be formed, as one becomes a person only by intending others as persons and by being so intended by others".⁵¹ Put differently, dialogue is a structure of reciprocal intentions, a mutual co-intending. As such, it can be developed through the dynamic of call and response.

⁵⁰ CTP, p115.

⁵¹ CTP, p116.

The identity of a person is formed (or deformed) through the call of others and God. Persons are called into being by the expectations of others, which are mediated through their form of address. The range of communicative possibilities is restricted by the sedimentation of identity, that is, a tendency to enter into relations and communication in a certain way. As persons with particular identities and sedimentations of communicative histories, there are two possibilities for any particular relation. First, partners may simply reduplicate their previous identities without being changed into 'different' persons in any sense. One example of this might be the interaction between a shopkeeper and a customer, where, unless something decisive happens (a robbery? Or, even meeting at the railway station!), neither shopkeeper nor customer will understand their identity in a new way. Or second, the relation proves to be of such personal significance that the partners' identity may be transformed by it. In this case, the 'new sedimentation' is always deposited upon a previously sedimented base, which is a prime determinant for meaning and significance for the person, although this may be restructured in the process.

In both of these cases, the past communication is orientated towards the future, but they can be of such a form that no 'development' occurs, rather, there is such a discontinuity between the past identity and the future sedimentation that a breakdown of identity can occur. In both cases the new identity is a transformation of the old, but one is undistorted and the other is distorted. Undistorted relations are formed to the extent that they conform to Christ and respond to Christ's call.

Jesus' personal identity was marked by its liberatory aspect, that is, his call took the form of an open invitation to establish relations with people on a different basis from which they were currently contextualised. In short, Jesus found people in

closed, broken and distorted communication contexts, and set them free by placing them in an alternative communication context from which a new identity could be sedimented. The significant difference between undistorted and distorted communication is that:

Interpersonal relations conformed to and transformed by the redemptive presence of Christ are dialogical in form. In dialogue an address intends the other as a person, as an autonomous subject of communication. This means that... the addressee is none the less intended and expected as one who is not *wholly* determined by the initiating communication.⁵²

The undistorted form of address intends the other as a responsible subject orientated towards a genuine mutuality of understanding in dialogue. There is therefore an intention of unforced mutuality in an open dialogue. If one partner has a hidden agenda, and is therefore not genuinely present in the communication, his/her dialogue is not genuine and becomes distorted. There is consequently a relation between the form and content of an address. A mutuality of understanding occurs when the form and content of the relation match that which is intended in the communication.

A person is conformed to Christ in making a genuine response to the address of God and others. In conforming to Christ, one becomes a person for others which involves a radical openness to God and others in such a way that our present way of being and understanding of ourselves may be transformed by new information as we recognise a significant difference in the other. Response involves attending and returning to the other as he or she is present in communication. There is an openness to allow the call of others to transform us in response which leads to a renewed orientation or centredness on oneself and the other. However, identity is not structured by a total openness as this would lead to a vacuous self, but also a closure proper to an individually centred identity. There is, in other words, a (dialectical)

⁵² CTP, p119.

interplay between the identity intended by the caller and the self-intention and identity of the called. The process of self-formation happens both diachronically and synchronically through the sedimentation of the history of significant relations. In short:

Call denotes the way in which one's identity is informed by the spirit in which significant others enter into relation with and intend one in communication. Response refers to the way in which one is defined by one's own spirit of relation, the form in which one intends oneself and others in communication.⁵³

McFadyen brings both the theological and secular poles together in giving an account of redeemed relations. Thus far the focus has been on McFadyen's use of the dynamic of call and response which draws into it some of the other categories: mutual reciprocity, dialectical dialogue, sedimentation, and conformity to Christ. McFadyen further develops this basic framework by extending it to include ethical transcendence, (mutual) expectation, reflection, a more detailed consideration of dialogue, personal integrity, fidelity and commitment, and identification and resistance of distorted communication. However, as the basic elements are clear by now, further detail will only detract from seeing the interaction between theological and secular discourses more clearly.

Methodologically, most of the categories that McFadyen has been using have been derived from the theological pole but transcend it and are therefore relevant for secular discourse as well. McFadyen's discussion of Har   suggests that these categories could have been developed without recourse to theological discourse.⁵⁴

⁵³ CTP, p122.

⁵⁴ A number of books have appeared since McFadyen's, which are written from a secular perspective but pick up and develop many of these aspects. Most notable perhaps is Paul Ricoeur's account of 'narrative identity' as a response to the problem of personal identity. Whereas McFadyen identifies fidelity and commitment as important loci for the permanence of the self in time, Ricoeur expands these loci by focusing on character and keeping one's word. See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself As Another*, (trans.) Kathleen Blamey, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992, esp. Chapters 5 and 6. Another very important book that is highly indebted to Ricoeur's analysis is Calvin O. Schrag, *The Self After Postmodernity*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997. To a lesser extent, Charles Taylor's authoritative book also overlaps in places, especially Part 1 (Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See also Anthony

Writing as a theologian, it obviously aids McFadyen's task if theological dialogue transcends its own sphere, but this does not indicate why theological discourse is necessary to anthropology, especially when considered from a secular perspective. In short, if these categories could have come about without theological discourse why is theology actually pertinent to the discussion of personhood? One reviewer summarises the problem and McFadyen's solution thus:

It is doubtless true that an entirely secular account of the formation of persons by the sedimentation of relationships can be given – but not by McFadyen. 'Christ' for him becomes an ontological principle, not just the norm for relationships, more a description of that power which enables redeemed relationships to be at all.⁵⁵

The answer, in other words, is that for McFadyen, 'the presence of Christ', 'conformity to Christ' and 'the call of Christ' function as an ontological and formal principle for undistorted relations and therefore fully realised personhood (McFadyen's second theological axiom in Part I). An account of all of the other main categories: the dynamic of call and response, dialectical dialogue, reciprocal mutuality, and sedimentation can be given without explicit reference to theology, but for McFadyen, this would not offer an adequate account of personhood as it would miss the most important dimension – what it is to be a creature before God. This aspect is what a theological account can offer distinctively from a secular account.

However, a further problem arises. Although crucial to McFadyen's task, and also our discussion of the relation between theological and secular discourse, it is not always clear how 'Christ' as an ontological or formal principle actually functions.⁵⁶ Three forms of the principle recur and are used interchangeably: the presence of

Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1991; and Robert G. Dunn, *Identity Crises: A Social Critique of Postmodernity*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

⁵⁵ Timothy Gorringer, 'Review: The Call to Personhood', in *SJT*, 46/1, 1993, p115.

⁵⁶ In addition to the issues explored in the main text, the danger of this kind of approach is that a 'principle' tends not to recognise particularity. This is a charge often levelled against Barth's Christology (see John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1978, p5).

Christ, conformity to Christ, and the call of Christ. Recalling McFadyen's second theological axiom in Part I, the call of Christ or the call to discipleship, there are a few clues:

Individuality is reconstituted in this response [to Christ's call] through a *recontextualisation in which the relation with God (the God context) becomes absolutely determinative*. It is a recontextualisation in a double sense: ... *a new orientation in one's social context, and... a new way of being in relations*.⁵⁷

Christ's call recontextualises persons into a new meaning frame. ... [T]hey are recontextualised in a world which has remained objectively the same but which is transformed in their subjectivities and which is therefore intended by them in a different way in communication which may, in turn, lead them to *transform it*.⁵⁸

A relation is conformed to Christ... when it tends towards an undistorted dialogical structure of call and response.⁵⁹

The key loci deriving from the 'Christ principle' appear to be recontextualisation of the person's orientation and meaning framework, and communication that tends towards an undistorted structure of call and response. However, when the principle is applied in Part III when Rules 1 and 2 are placed into a genuine dialogue, it is not always apparent how the principle actually functions. There seems to be a number of ways in which the principle is significant for personal identity: the Christ principle individuates; ex-centrally orientates; centres; opens the self to the other, change, disappointment, and suffering; structures, recontextualises, transforms and secures personal identity; explicates, provides a rational basis for communication; and reciprocally co-intends. The significance of McFadyen's second theological axiom is apparent in general terms and appears throughout his argument, but the application becomes a bit more 'fuzzy' when applied to concrete situations. Part of the problem is that many secular accounts would also postulate many of these facets about personhood without reference to Christ. Of the variety of uses of the Christ principle, two functions appear to be particularly significant.

⁵⁷ CTP, p56 (my italics).

⁵⁸ CTP, p57 (my italics).

⁵⁹ CTP, p60 (my italics).

First, a person is orientated or centred on him or herself as an autonomous subject of communication. Self-orientation is properly constituted only when it accompanies and serves an external orientation and responds to the communicated presence of God and others. The form of God's Word communicates a particular intention and understanding of what it is to be a person in relation to God, and Christ's call is to make this understanding our own in a responsible existence before God and others. The presence of Christ is a formal principle of the relation informing expectation, intention, and understanding of self and the other. Put differently, God's intention of and for us informs a new self-understanding. It is in providing an affirmative response to God's call that we are transformed into becoming full and genuine persons. In short, right response in and through conforming to the presence of Christ's call enables us to become fully persons.

Second, through the orienting of the self toward God, the relationship to the other is recontextualised into a divine communication context in which it is possible to attend to the other as he or she should be. This is what it means to respond to the call of Christ: "The call of the person is genuinely heard when it is heard as the call of Christ present in that person as structuring a genuine individual identity. And the response is genuine when it is orientated towards a mutuality of understanding which is conformed to Christ."⁶⁰ In other words, the relation is structured and ordered by the redemptive presence of the Word, not the words of the partner. Ultimately, it is Christ who is the formative principle.

It is not only the presence of Christ that shapes personhood, but also the Holy Spirit. McFadyen gives surprisingly little place to the role of the Spirit in constituting identity, but there is one clear way in which the Spirit informs identity:

⁶⁰ CTP, p141.

The Holy Spirit may also be understood in terms of energy, as the divine energiser which dwells and acts in the world as the life-giving organisational energy of open systems. The Holy Spirit may indwell and empower an individual's spirit, and so inform the person's orientation towards 'self' (centredness) and openness to others, the world and God. Where the Holy Spirit co-inheres with that of Christ, divine energy is divinely ordered. When this co-inherence occurs within a personal life, centredness and self-transcendence are genuinely structured as one is for oneself and others in a genuine way.⁶¹

The Spirit's role does go beyond the centring of individuals. In the "empowering co-inherence of the Father, Son and Spirit" the hope of reaching a genuine mutuality of understanding can be sustained by faith.⁶² What is a bit peculiar in relation to McFadyen's method and content, is that although human existence is in the image of the Trinity (McFadyen's first theological axiom in Part I), very little attention is given to the significance of the (economic) Trinity (as distinct from the work of Christ) for constituting personhood, and similarly the work of the Spirit in bringing about 'conformity to Christ'.⁶³ Additionally, McFadyen's Christology is concerned primarily with the horizontal relation between Jesus and the rest of humanity, not the vertical relation between Jesus and the Father. Conversely, McFadyen's explication of human relation function both vertically and horizontally. It is not clear, therefore, what the mediating role of Jesus' divinity plays in this regard (i.e. humanity-Jesus-God?).

Related to this, McFadyen underestimates the role of eschatology in the constitution of the person, and especially personal identity (or, what it means to be 'in Christ'). Although McFadyen is very strong on what Paul Ricoeur calls 'narrative identity' on account of 'sedimentation', he places insufficient attention on the relationship between eschatology and theological anthropology.⁶⁴ Eschatology is

⁶¹ *CTP*, pp155-156. See also p63.

⁶² *CTP*, p166.

⁶³ This has been noted by Gorringe, 'Review', p115.

⁶⁴ To some extent, McFadyen addresses this problem in his later work in relation to praise, the doctrine of sin, and especially child abuse. See: esp. McFadyen, 'Healing the Damaged'; also McFadyen, 'The Abuse of the Family'; and McFadyen, and Ford, 'Praise'. Cf. Chapter 7 below.

crucial for at least two reasons.⁶⁵ First, theological anthropology is concerned with the new creature of God: "[the] ontology of the human is shaped by that eschatological event in which the creature's goal is confirmed even as the creature is put to death and made alive in Christ".⁶⁶ In other words, theological anthropology is concerned with convertedness and the new life in the Spirit. Second, theological anthropology is eschatological in that its account of human identity is possessed of a distinct teleology. Christian personal identity is to be related to the *eschaton*, i.e., construed not only in terms of the past but also the future. However, this it to move beyond our immediate concerns.

In summary, McFadyen brings together theological and secular discourse, Rules 1 and 2, without losing the distinctness of either discourse and draws them into dialogue. He further isolates the distinctive contribution of theology to discussion of the self in the form of the Christ principle, that is, the presence of Christ, conformity to Christ, and the call of Christ. This means that the categories which McFadyen developed on the basis of theological discourse cannot be thought of in solely secular terms unless a less adequate understanding of personhood is to be offered.

In the final section, McFadyen extends the framework of his anthropology to socio-political relations or institutions and organisations. The basic framework that McFadyen has been developing, persons as organisational centres, is both applicable to, and dependent upon institutions.⁶⁷ Corporate relations too are fallen and so in need of redemption. Undistorted relations even at the institutional level are also dialogical in character. What does come through in this last section is McFadyen's

⁶⁵ John Webster, 'Eschatology, Anthropology, and Postmodernity', in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 2/1, March 2000, pp14-15 (reprinted in John Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001, Chapter 9). See also, John Webster, 'Eschatology, Ontology and Human Action', in *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 7, 1991, pp4-18.

⁶⁶ Webster, 'Eschatology, Anthropology, and Postmodernity', p14.

⁶⁷ For instance, *CTP*, p201.

concern for praxis. Throughout the book McFadyen does indicate some of the ethical implications of his anthropological framework and this is perhaps clearest in Part IV. However, McFadyen's basic framework and method are clear by now, and although significant for the content of McFadyen's argument as a whole, this section does not add to the analysis of the relation between theological and secular discourse.

4 Secular Discourse in McFadyen's Anthropology

In this section I will summarise McFadyen's argument, consider the relation between secular discourse and his theological anthropology, and finally raise the question about whether possible weaknesses in McFadyen's anthropology result from the integration of theological and secular discourse.

4.1 The Basic Outline of McFadyen's Anthropology

It is clear by now that McFadyen's basic argument takes a dialectical form. Broadly speaking, the basic framework consists in a thesis, the theological pole (Part I); an antithesis, the secular pole (Part II); and a synthesis, a genuine dialogue between the theological and secular poles (Parts III and IV). As such, McFadyen's content has remained true to his self-understanding of his method. In particular, McFadyen's method is structured by his understanding of the task of theology, 'to understand and critically reflect upon Christian doctrine, tradition and history on the one hand, and the social, cultural and intellectual world in which we are living on the other'. Following from McFadyen's understanding of the task of theology, his enquiry was structured by two Rules: affirming the priority of God in theological method, and

critically engaging with the determinate, and culturally embodied situation. McFadyen's First and Second Rules are both necessary but insufficient conditions for the theological task.

McFadyen's theological task is structured by two key theological axioms: human existence in the image of the trinitarian God, and the call of Christ. On the basis of these axioms, McFadyen develops four main categories which structure the constitution of personhood and transcend theological discourse: the dynamic of call and response, dialectical dialogue and reciprocal mutuality, and conformity to Christ. At this stage the categories have been developed primarily on the basis of a theological approach and will be worked through in relation to secular discourses.

McFadyen then turns from theological discourse specifically to secular discourse using Harré's psychology and philosophy of science. On the basis of Harré's work, McFadyen charts some physical and social structures through which relations are conducted. This leads to an understanding of the self which is essentially a public structure where one's sense of self is determined through personal or internal centring. As such, the self is an organisational process centring around a personal core. These social relations or structures are guided by the process of sedimentation – the process in which personal identity is constituted through significant histories of call and response. Sedimentation is a further category which can be added to the dynamic of call and response, dialectical dialogue and reciprocal mutuality, and conformity to Christ, all of which are crucial loci for identifying and describing the self. These categories transcend both the theological and secular approaches from which they originated as they are equally applicable in both kinds of discourse.

Thus far McFadyen has successfully maintained Rules 1 and 2: the primacy of God in theological method and critical engagement with the determinate situation.

Up to this point Rules 1 and 2 complement each other and describe important dimensions of personhood, but are not yet integrated in 'dialogue'. In the next section McFadyen brings together theological and secular discourse, Rules 1 and 2, without losing the distinctness of either discourse and draws them into dialogue. He isolates the distinctive contribution of theology to discussion of the self in the form of the Christ principle: the presence of Christ, conformity to Christ, and the call of Christ. This means that the categories which McFadyen developed on the basis of theological discourse cannot be thought of in solely secular terms unless a less adequate understanding of personhood is to be offered. In short, as one reviewer puts it, "individuals can only attain full, centred, and autonomous personhood by entering into an undistorted relationship of dialogue with Christ, in and through a genuine response to the address of other persons".⁶⁸

4.ii Secular discourse in McFadyen's Anthropology

The key aspect of McFadyen's thought for our concern with the relation between theological and secular discourse is his understanding of the task of theology and the ensuing two Rules which structure his approach. The rest of the book is the working out of this key in relation to one specific area of theology; anthropology. For McFadyen, a 'genuine' and 'open' dialogue between theological and secular discourse entails an openness to learning from, and being criticised by the other form of discourse in such a way that the distinct contribution of each mode of discourse can be maintained. By extension, such a dialogue between theological and secular

⁶⁸ Jean Porter, 'Review: The Call to Personhood', in *Theological Studies*, 53, 1992, p366.

discourse is open and undistorted to the extent that it 'conforms to Christ'. However, here we come up against a problem that McFadyen does not address.

In the dialogue between theological and secular discourse, there are two or more disciplines which function from within their own hermeneutical circles according to their own operative criteria. McFadyen is clear that following Rule 1, the priority of God is to be maintained in theological method and also that dialogue does not necessarily entail agreement between the partners, but that willingness to be open to hearing and understanding the other in an ongoing dialectical process is required. But what happens when, say, a branch of psychology makes a discovery that calls into question an aspect of theological anthropology. For instance, it could be plausibly argued on an empirical basis that relations are the consequences, not constituting factors, of personal identity. Three options are open to the theologian: ignore the discovery, accommodate the discovery within an already pre-existing theological framework, or revise the theological framework in the light of the discovery. The problem is that the different forms of discourse operate from within different frameworks of understanding. This 'discovery' may only be acceptable from within the parameters of psychology and not theology. But say that the parameters are to be acceptable to the theologian. This leaves options two and three open. The choice of either option would then hinge upon the primary operative criteria (or ultimate criteria) that are in play, in McFadyen's case the primacy of God in theological method. But if McFadyen opts for option two, there is a question about the extent to which he really is open to being criticised by secular discourse, and for option three, secular discourse and not theology has operative (and ultimate?) primacy. What, then, does it actually mean to maintain the primacy of God in

theological method? Does this Rule draw too hard a distinction between form and content?

The characterisation of operative criteria in theological and secular discourse that has just been offered does rest upon a monological reading of secular discourse. It fails to account sufficiently for the complexity of secular discourse(s); 'are all forms of secular discourse to be attributed the same weight?', 'how are we to distinguish between them?', 'what kind of criteria might we apply to evaluate secular discourse(s)?'. However, the reason the characterisation stands, and the reason that McFadyen cannot help us answer these questions, is that he too has largely adopted a monological reading of secular discourse. Although there is some reference to Habermas and a few other secular thinkers, McFadyen's account of secular discourse is almost entirely dependent upon Rom Harré, whose thought we might add, fits very well with the theological approach being offered (Macmurray, Buber, Levinas, and Ricoeur might have served just as well). There is not even a mention of Marx, Engels, Freud, Weber, Smith, Keynes, Popper, Foucault, Giddens, Bauman,⁶⁹ or many other key secular theorists, whose thought would be difficult to appropriate in the same way as Harré's.⁷⁰ However useful Harré's thought may be, it is simply inadequate to focus on one person to represent secular approaches to the self. Paradoxically it is Karl Barth and not McFadyen who takes the breadth of secular discourse seriously in this way. Although McFadyen does enter into dialogue with secular discourse in a way which Barth does not, it can be argued that Barth takes secular discourse more seriously on its own terms because he engages with a far broader range of thinkers, albeit critically. In anticipation of Chapters 4, we simply

⁶⁹ It is worth noting that McFadyen makes good use of Bauman in particular in *Bound to Sin*.

⁷⁰ A similar criticism is made by John Webster against David Ford's *Self and Salvation*, which in many ways attempts a similar task to McFadyen's in respect of a dialogue between theological and secular discourse (John Webster, 'Article Review: David F. Ford: *Self and Salvation*', *SJT*, 54/4, 2001, p552). See Chapter 1 above.

note at this stage that in his anthropology, Barth systematically engages with key thinkers from at least four significant schools of thought on their own terms: naturalism (Zöckler, Otto, Titius, and Portmann), idealism (Fichte), existentialism (Jaspers) and theistic anthropology (Brunner), not to mention his well-known critique of Nietzsche.⁷¹ This said, insofar as McFadyen does enter into dialogue with secular discourse his approach is highly instructive. Let us turn to consider first some of the benefits that are gained from a dialogue between theological and secular discourse, and then some possible drawbacks of the dialogue for the theologian.

For a genuine dialogue between theological and secular discourse, the communication necessarily moves in both directions. What do secular discourses gain from McFadyen's theological approach? First, if one is to accept McFadyen's argument, theological anthropology gives a more adequate description of personhood than secular discourse because the human creature can only be properly understood as a creature of God. Again this will become more evident in Chapter 4 when considering Barth's anthropology. Furthermore, given the conditions of the Fall, all forms of discourse are rendered both provisional and incomplete. Additionally, the doctrine of sin plays a crucial constituting role of personal identity after the Fall, and this remains primarily within the theological domain. The implications of this will be expanded at length in Chapter 3.

Second, if the theological framework offered for understanding personhood is accepted there are significant ethical implications. A relational understanding of the person is not an abstract doctrine, but necessarily affects the way we live and relate to others. In McFadyen's case, the 'Christ principle' structures relations on both the

⁷¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/ii: The Doctrine of Creation*, (eds.) Bromiley G. W., and Torrance T. F., T&T Clark, 1998, pp77-132; 231-242. Cf. footnote 8.

individual and corporate levels. By extension, as McFadyen's main focus in *The Call to Personhood* is on undistorted relations, this provides a criterion from which distorted relations can be judged. This becomes especially important for McFadyen in his publications on the doctrine of sin, and particularly in cases of child abuse to which we will turn in the following chapter.⁷²

The dialogue also moves in the other direction (secular discourse/ culture to theology). In fact, McFadyen's engagement with secular discourse is so strong that he has been charged with not presenting "a thoroughgoing *theological* reconceptualizing of the self or of human personhood".⁷³ Interestingly this comment was made by someone whose understanding of the task of theology, much like McFadyen's, is to portray "Christian beliefs as a comprehensive, coherent whole, as well as relating the Christian belief mosaic *faithfully and relevantly to contemporary culture*".⁷⁴ Furthermore, Stanley Grenz, from whom this quotation was taken, wants to prioritise the *imago Dei* as central to personhood. In other words, a theologian who broadly speaking stands in the same tradition as McFadyen, who is sympathetic with his approach, whose own approach to anthropology is similar both in that it is relational and derived from an understanding of God as Trinity, and also wants to engage with secular discourse, does not find McFadyen's account to be 'theological enough'. This, however, is not so much a comment upon Grenz's reading of

⁷² McFadyen, 'Ritual Abuse'; McFadyen, 'Praise'; McFadyen, 'Crime and Violence'; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'Sins of Praise: The Assault on God's Freedom', in Colin E. Gunton, (ed.), *God and Freedom: Essays in Historical and Systematic Theology*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995, pp32-56; McFadyen, 'The Abuse of the Family'; McFadyen, 'Healing the Damaged'; McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'Sin', in Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason, and Hugh Pyper, (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; McFadyen, *Forgiveness and Truth*.

⁷³ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p14. Grenz does however note that McFadyen's anthropology is not "devoid of theological engagement" (p14). In contrast, whilst acknowledging McFadyen's indebtedness to secular discourse a more theological reading of his work has been given by Robin Greenwood, *Transforming Priesthood: A New Theology of Mission and Ministry*, London: SPCK, 1994, pp104-107; and Francis Watson, *Text, Church, and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994, pp107-115.

⁷⁴ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, *pix* (my italics). See also ppx; esp.8-9; 14; 20.

McFadyen – the comment certainly has some weight to it – as an observation about relational theological anthropologies more generally. And this is where the significance of McFadyen's dialogue, and more specifically, the positive role that secular discourse plays in his theology can be seen most clearly.

The basis for relational approaches to theological anthropology usually rests upon a *perichoretic* understanding of God as Trinity and emphasises the continuities between divine and human personhood, as indeed does McFadyen. But McFadyen's engagement with secular discourse prevents him from falling into some theological difficulties that are common amongst many other relational anthropologists.⁷⁵

Because McFadyen engages with secular discourse he is acutely aware of the way in which the form of communication affects the content.⁷⁶ Consequently McFadyen recognises that even God's address is encoded in a determinate form in order to be understandable.⁷⁷ This has three major theological implications for McFadyen's theology that remain a weakness in many other relational theological anthropologists who, broadly speaking, can be placed in the same tradition. The first, as mentioned earlier, is that most theological accounts of personhood make a methodological assumption that relational concepts of the Trinity can be immediately applied to human personhood. These approaches tend to overlook the question of how one moves from divine to human relations, and consequently often underestimate

⁷⁵ For example: Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982; Ford, *Self and Salvation*; Colin E. Gunton, and Christoph Schwöbel, (eds.), *Persons, Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991; Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991; Colin E. Gunton, *The One The Three, and The Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity; The 1992 Bampton Lectures*, Cambridge University Press, 1995; Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*; Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995; Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation with special reference to Volume One of Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*, T&T Clark, 1996; Zizioulas, 'Human Capacity and Human Incapacity'; John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985.

⁷⁶ Cf. Marshall McLuhan's well-known slogan 'the medium is the message' (Marshall McLuhan, and Quinten Fiore, *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).

⁷⁷ CTP, pp195f.

the discontinuities between divine and human persons.⁷⁸ This is particularly clear in John Zizioulas' theological anthropology which tends to underestimate the boundaries of the self.⁷⁹ The under-emphasis on the discontinuity between divine and human persons is also evident in his understanding of salvation in which "the personal life which is realised in God should also be realised on the level of human existence".⁸⁰ For Zizioulas, it is not entirely clear what differentiates divine and human personhood, which is a direct result of paying insufficient attention to method and the role of secular discourse in structuring human relations.

The second weakness follows from the first. Relational anthropologies often take insufficient account of the actual relations through which persons are constituted, most notably institutional relations. Apart from McFadyen, Colin Gunton has perhaps tried to engage with this aspect of personhood more than most, having written a number of books that are concerned, at least in part, with the way in which human beings subsist in creation.⁸¹ But even Gunton is concerned with the continuity between human beings and culture only at the most general level. In short, most relational accounts of human being by theologians lack a consideration of the actual relations through which human beings are constituted, and this is one of the great strengths of McFadyen's book which comes directly from engaging with secular discourse. Put another way, most relational anthropologists argue that personhood is predominantly the result of relationships between the particular person and God, others, the self, and the world, but because McFadyen engages with secular discourse

⁷⁸ See esp. McFadyen, 'The Trinity and Human Individuality'.

⁷⁹ See Edward J. N. Russell, 'Reconsidering Relational Anthropology: A Critical Assessment of John Zizioulas' Theological Anthropology', in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, forthcoming.

⁸⁰ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 50.

⁸¹ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*; Colin E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation: The Didsbury Lectures*, Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1992; Gunton, *The One The Three, and The Many*; Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.

he is able to consider the shape of the actual relations through which persons are constituted thus giving a more adequate anthropology.

And third, related to insufficient attention being given to the actual relations through which human being is constituted many relational anthropologies underestimate the gravity of sin.⁸² A strong doctrine of sin is crucial for theological anthropology. In the first place, this ensures the proper systematic relation to other doctrines (especially the cross and resurrection), and in the second place, when interpreted in conjunction with eschatology, it enables an understanding of human embodiment in the world, or, what it means to live *in* the world but not *of* the world. To incorporate this into theological anthropology involves considering both theological and non-theological loci. Such an understanding necessarily considers the role of secular discourse in self-constitution. This aspect of McFadyen's anthropology, which again is ensured by engaging with secular discourse, does not come through particularly strongly until after the 1993 shift, although fallenness does appear more strongly in McFadyen's account than in those of many other relational anthropologists.⁸³

Before considering a possible weakness in McFadyen's method, it is worth clarifying McFadyen's position with regard to apologetics. Because of McFadyen's concern with 'dialogue' it might appear at first glance that McFadyen's task is essentially an apologetic one. There is a sense in which this is the case. Like Barth, McFadyen see a relationship between theology and secular discourse in which theology is both to borrow selectively from the secular in order to expound aspects of

⁸² See Russell, 'Reconsidering Relational Anthropology'.

⁸³ McFadyen, 'Ritual Abuse'; McFadyen, 'Crime and Violence'; McFadyen, 'The Abuse of the Family'; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'Healing the Damaged'; McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*; Alistair I. McFadyen, and Marcel Sarot, (eds.), *Forgiveness and Truth*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001.

theology and offer distinctive illumination to aspects of 'secular discourse'. The latter point is significantly more pronounced in McFadyen's thought in contrast to Barth's, which would be the main reason for seeing McFadyen's task as apologetic. However, like Barth, McFadyen emphatically rejects any form of apologetics insofar as apologetics can be understood as offering some kind of a defence of the Christian faith according to the canons of secular rationality. Again like Barth, McFadyen gives ultimate priority to God's self-revelation in Christ through the Spirit and only operative priority to secular discourse. In this respect, McFadyen is not concerned to make the Christian faith appear (or even argue that it is) 'reasonable' to the secular mind. He does, however, give greater operative priority to secular discourse than Barth does as we shall see below.

4.iii A Weakness?

Having highlighted some of the strengths of a dialogue between theological and secular discourse, let us now turn a more critical eye towards McFadyen's anthropology, and see whether a perceived weakness results from this dialogue.

A major weakness that appears consistently throughout *The Call to Personhood* is identified in Harriett Harris' provocative article. She rightly recognises that "[a] frequently occurring problem in McFadyen's work and elsewhere is that discussions about personality or about the sense of one's self are treated as discussions about personhood (what it is to be a person) and about personal identity (what it is to be the same person over time)".⁸⁴ As is evident from this chapter, McFadyen consistently conflates the distinctions between personality, person(hood),

⁸⁴ Harris, 'Should we say that Personhood is Relational?', pp216-217.

present character, sense of myself, sense of myself as a person, and personal identity. In short, McFadyen fails to distinguish sufficiently between personhood and personal identity.⁸⁵ Harris is again instructive here. She comments: "The underlying problem of all of the relational accounts considered here [McFadyen, Elaine Graham, and Vincent Brümmer] is failure to attend to how notions of personal development which have been informed by social science should relate to notions of personhood which are intended to be normative or ontological".⁸⁶

Although Harris rightly recognises that the failure to distinguish between personhood and personal identity is not exclusive to McFadyen, she indicates that one reason for this might be the role of secular discourse (especially social science) in theological anthropology. Most secular approaches to the self are rarely concerned with personhood (what it is to be a person) so much as personal identity (a sedimentation of the history of personal interaction). This is especially true for the social sciences with which McFadyen is mainly concerned. The social sciences focus on personal identity, that is, the interaction between persons, how they are formed and so on, not what makes them a person. This is specifically the domain of personal identity and not personhood which may reflect a difference between social scientific approaches to the self and theological conceptions of the self as well as some secular accounts (for instance, some philosophical approaches). In this respect, McFadyen would be well advised to recognise a greater breadth and diversity of approaches in 'secular discourse' which would help eliminate this kind of confusion. For example, McFadyen's theological pole is largely the domain of the person, i.e., a theological ontology of our 'make-up'; whereas the secular pole (with the possible exception of

⁸⁵ The Christological ramifications of a parallel distinction are set out well in Stephen W. Sykes, 'The Theology of the Humanity of Christ', in Stephen W. Sykes, and John P. Clayton, *Christ, Faith and History: Cambridge Studies in Christology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

⁸⁶ Harris, 'Should we say that Personhood is Relational?', p223.

philosophy) is largely concerned with 'identity', the sedimentation of relations. In actual fact, because McFadyen consistently conflates this distinction he deals with both person *and* identity in both poles and the following interaction between them in Parts III and IV. This arises in large part from giving insufficient attention to the differences between philosophical/ theological approaches to the self and social scientific approaches.

There are two main ways that McFadyen could have avoided this problem. In the first instance, if he consistently maintained the distinction between person and personal identity, he could have done so across both disciplines with some care. In the second instance, he could have offered first a theological account of the ontology of the person, and then a secular account of how the relations between persons are formed. To some extent, McFadyen seems to want to do both at the same time. The content of his book lends itself to the first option, but the structure to the second. This is not a problem that necessarily results from engagement with secular discourse, it has come about in large part due to insufficient clarity of thought on this issue by the author, but engagement with the social sciences certainly fuels the problem. In fairness to McFadyen, this problem is not exclusive to this book, but is shared by many theological anthropologies as Harris shows.

5. Conclusion

The primary task of this chapter was to examine the role of secular discourse in Alistair McFadyen's theological anthropology. McFadyen considers engagement with secular discourse to be a necessary but insufficient condition of the task of theology. Consequently, secular discourse plays a crucial role in his theological anthropology which is developed through a dialectical dialogue between theological

and secular discourse. This dialogue is to be guided by two Rules: the primacy of God in theological method and critical engagement with the determinate situation. Adherence to these two Rules will mean that theology is responsible *in* the current context but not *to* it.

Some attention was directed to the positive role of the dialogue for both the theological and the secular poles of the discourse. A weakness was also highlighted in McFadyen's content which was found to have been fuelled in part by this dialogue. Overall, McFadyen's method illustrates extremely well both the importance of maintaining both the theological and secular poles as part of the theological task and also how to engage the two poles. The next chapter will follow McFadyen's further development of this dialogue which to some extent rests upon the framework outlined in this chapter.

The secondary task of this chapter was to explicate McFadyen's theological anthropology. In doing this five key categories became clear: the dynamic of call and response, dialectical dialogue and reciprocal mutuality, sedimentation, and conformity to Christ. All of these categories were crucial for identifying the self and transcend both the theological and secular approaches from which they originated. The primary task of the chapter could only be conducted by way of the secondary task. This consideration and much of the content illustrates that form and content are inseparable. In McFadyen's terminology it would be fair to say that there is a necessary 'interweaving' between them.

The following chapter charts significant developments in both McFadyen's form and content. With regard to content, McFadyen's focus shifts from the self to the doctrine of sin, although these doctrines are not unconnected. With regard to

form, McFadyen extends his dialectical dialogue between theological and secular discourse in a particularly impressive way.

CHAPTER 3

Secular Discourse in Alistair McFadyen's Doctrine of Sin

1. Introduction

The central concern of this chapter is to highlight some significant developments in the form and content of Alistair McFadyen's later theology. This will shed further light on the interaction between theological and secular discourse. The indebtedness to his earlier work will become clear, but a greater depth and clarity of thought is evident in his more recent work which focuses largely on the doctrine of sin. The most comprehensive example of McFadyen's later work can be seen in his book *Bound to Sin* which will be the main focus of this chapter.¹ Again, other publications of this period will also be considered.²

My argument can be set out as follows. Initially, McFadyen's self-understanding of his method in *Bound to Sin* will be presented. Attention will then be

¹ Alistair I. McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 [hereafter *BTS*].

² Alistair I. McFadyen, with Helga Hanks, and Cath Adams, 'Ritual Abuse: A Definition', in *Child Abuse Review*, 2/1, 1993, pp35-41; Alistair I. McFadyen, with David F. Ford, 'Praise', in Peter Sedgwick, (ed.), *God in the City*, London: Mowbray, 1995, pp95-104; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'Crime and Violence: The UPA as the Place of Demons?', in Peter Sedgwick, (ed.), *God in the City*, London: Mowbray, 1995, pp178-190; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'Sins of Praise: The Assault on God's Freedom', in Colin E. Gunton, (ed.), *God and Freedom: Essays in Historical and Systematic Theology*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995, pp32-56; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'The Abuse of the Family', in Hugh S. Pyper, (ed.), *The Christian Family: A Concept in Crisis*, Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1996, pp102-117; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'Healing the Damaged', in David F. Ford, and Dennis Stamps, (eds.), *Essentials of Christian Community*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, pp91-103; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'Christians in Public Life: The Theological Challenge', in David Clark, (ed.), *Changing World Unchanging Church?*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group- Mowbray, 1997, pp60-63; Alistair I. McFadyen, 'Sin', in Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason, and Hugh Pyper, (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Alistair I. McFadyen, and Marcel Sarot, (eds.), *Forgiveness and Truth*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001; Alistair I. McFadyen, and John Inge, 'Art in a Cathedral', in Jeremy Begbie (ed.), *Sounding the Depths: Theology Through the Arts*, London: SCM Press, 2002.

directed towards some of the key aspects of the content of his argument. In particular, we will focus on the secular readings of the two pathologies that McFadyen considers: the sexual abuse of children and the holocaust, the role of the will, feminist and Augustinian doctrines of sin, and the question of 'standards' from which sin should be judged. Because McFadyen's argument is a cumulative one, it is necessary to enter into the detail of it to understand its force. Analogous to the previous chapter, some of the positive and negative implications of the dialogue between theological and secular discourse will be explored. It will be concluded that McFadyen's approach is highly informative for the relation between theological and secular discourse, although again he may not have taken sufficient account of the intricacies of secular discourse.

2. Method in Bound to Sin

The core of *Bound to Sin* is the thesis that the doctrine of sin can function as a test of our ability to speak of God in relation to the world, and consequently, provides greater explanatory and descriptive power in relation to concrete pathologies than secular discourse.³ This means that McFadyen is putting his understanding of the task of theology (engaging with both 'the tradition' and 'culture' – Rules 1 and 2) to the test, and facing the challenge head on. Both theological and secular discourses will be allowed their own voices, and in doing this the distinctive contribution of theological discourse to two concrete pathologies will become evident. If it does not, if theology cannot contribute any further descriptive or explanatory power, the very purpose of

³ Although the doctrine of original sin plays an important role in the book, the "central commission" is emphatically not, as one reviewer suggests "to restore the doctrine of original sin to the centre of the Western theological lexicon" (Elaine Graham, "The Real Questions are Theological. Review: *Bound to Sin*" in *Reviews in Theology and Religion*, 8/3, June 2001, p256).

theology is called into question. In short, unless theology can make a contribution to the understanding of pathologies that cannot be made with secular discourse, there is little point to doing theology and God is indeed 'operationally excluded' from the affairs of the world.

McFadyen's concern is that modern theology does not collapse talk of God into secular frames of reference, nor reduces God to a 'God of the gaps' in which most of empirical reality occurs without any functioning reference to God. Theology is, in part, the discernment of God's presence and activity in the world and therefore must live in a critical and dialectical relationship to secular disciplines. Put differently, comprehension of the world is inadequate without functioning reference to God. Let me unpack some of the methodological implications of this.

The task of theology is:

to understand both God and reality from the perspective of God's concrete presence and activity in the world, and in relation to our concretely lived experiences of being in the world. ... Sin is a way of speaking of the pathological aspects of the world encountered by human beings as they live in it. ... If the doctrine of sin has no relation to empirical reality, cannot be tested by it in any way, then it is meaningless.⁴

Note the shift in McFadyen's understanding of the task of theology from his earlier work. Whereas previously he was concerned with a dialectical dialogue between theology and secular discourse, he now has such confidence in the ability of theology to have greater descriptive and explanatory power than secular discourse that he extends the dialogue into a form of empirical testing – one in which the very purpose of theology is called into question. Consequently, the descriptive and explanatory power of the doctrine of sin is pitted against the analyses of secular discourse in relation to concrete pathologies. And so, the first methodological thesis becomes clear: *The doctrine of sin is to be subjected to empirical testing*. But it is not yet clear how, or indeed if, this can happen.

⁴ BTS, p44.

A problem immediately presents itself. The doctrine of sin cannot be subjected to direct empirical testing. Doctrines of sin tend to be presented in an abstract and general form, which, like general theories of science, cannot be subjected to direct empirical testing. In both cases, general theories are only capable of indirect testing through the mediation of theories or models with a more specific and localised reference. And so, the doctrine of sin is capable of indirect testing when interpreted in conjunction with other theories or models with a specific reference which may themselves be empirically tested – viz., some forms of secular discourse. The second methodological thesis is a development from the first: *The doctrine of sin is to be subjected to indirect empirical testing through conversing with secular theories or models that are capable of direct empirical testing by having a specific and localised reference.* The two situations which McFadyen has chosen to test the doctrine of sin are the sexual abuse of children and the holocaust.⁵

The sexual abuse of children and the holocaust provide particularly rich environments for testing the doctrine of sin, not least because there is extensive literature written on both pathologies, but also because they are almost universally recognised as having reality, being pathological, and perhaps most importantly, without recourse to a specifically Christian or theological mode of discernment.⁶ In

⁵ On McFadyen's use of the rather cumbersome phrase 'the sexual abuse of children' see McFadyen, 'The Abuse of the Family', pp103-105. In short, this phrase focuses on the abuse of power, trust, and responsibility which occurs when children are abused by members of the family significantly older than themselves, in contrast to 'incest', which tends to refer to the breaking of social taboos, or at least does not emphasise the disjunction in age and power. See also: McFadyen, 'Healing the Damaged'; McFadyen, Hanks, and Adams, 'Ritual Abuse: A Definition'.

⁶ However, in both cases there are an increasing number of subversive voices which do not adhere to this. Paedophilia has been receiving an increasing amount of attention in the British media in recent months. There are voices, generally from paedophiles, that argue that they cannot help the way they are and consequently sexual relations with children are 'natural' (and therefore morally acceptable). Additionally, although not legal, child prostitution is now a global industry that is growing significantly in both the East and the West (see esp. Rita N. Brock, and Susan B. Thistlethwaite, *Casting Stones: Prostitution and Liberation in Asia and the United States*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). Regarding the holocaust, there is an increasing number of neo-Nazi groups in both Europe and the U.S.A., some of whom deny that the holocaust actually happened, others that it was 'good'. In fact, recent elections in France and Denmark have turned marginal fascist parties into the main opposition.

other words, if these situations are recognised as pathological without reference to the Christian God, the question of whether anything more or different can be said about them by Christian theologians is posed particularly acutely. The third and fourth methodological theses are now apparent: *The sexual abuse of children and the holocaust are not used as examples, but as concrete fields of testing encounter; Engaging these concrete phenomena requires an engagement and conversation with the secular disciplines in which they are analysed, interpreted, and resisted.* Put differently, McFadyen is trying "to understand and to test the doctrine of sin in and through a consideration of these two situations, which draws theology into conversation with secular forms of discernment and description".⁷ The purpose of this can be seen in a fifth methodological thesis: *to engage in a conversation in which the theological and secular interpretation of the pathological dynamics are both tested by each other's understanding and by the empirical realities of the situation.*

This process of testing means that theology may need to be open to change and correction if shown to be inadequate to the concrete realities of the pathology by secular discourse. It may, in short, need to be reconfigured. For McFadyen, this is part and parcel of the task of a theological tradition:

Being traditional, being shaped by tradition and handing it on (*tradere*), is an active, historical responsibility that is always, and can only be, worked out in the contingencies of concrete situations and through ad hoc correlations and conversations. ... The point is rather that tradition is something we take responsibility for in the making.⁸

It is clear, then, that McFadyen is not only open to theology being criticised (and reconstructed) by secular discourse, but that the "truth of God can only be found through conversation with non-theological (and, in our culture, that means

The point is that these pathologies are not 'universally' accepted as wrong. McFadyen does not mention any of these kinds of subversive voices.

⁷ *BTS*, p48.

⁸ *BTS*, p50. Cf. Karl Barth: "dogmatics as such does not ask what the apostles and the prophets said but what we must say on the basis of the apostles and prophets" (*Church Dogmatics I.1: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, (eds.) Bromiley, Geoffery, W., and Torrance, Thomas, F., Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995, p16).

pragmatically atheist) contemporary forms of understanding and practice”.⁹ This means that, and this is the sixth and final methodological thesis, *in order to be intelligible and true to itself, theology must necessarily engage in dialogue with secular forms of public explanation, understanding, and truth, which both confront and permeate the situation of a living theological tradition.*¹⁰ In other words, and this is important, engagement with secular discourse not only remains a necessary condition of the task of theology, as in McFadyen’s earlier work, but that it is a necessary (but insufficient) condition for theology to be ‘true to itself’. The uniqueness and distinctness of theology is maintained precisely in, through, and by, conversing with secular discourse, not by withdrawing from the world. Thus, McFadyen assumes that “theological discourses do refer and apply to reality in a way that makes a significant difference to interpreting and living in it”.¹¹ This is precisely what McFadyen intends to test in relation to concrete pathologies – that there is a theological dimension to them which secular frameworks are incapable of bringing to adequate expression. If theology – the doctrine of sin – cannot bring this pathological dynamic to expression, it has failed.

Part of the theological task is to discern and show secular discourse its own inner truth. If the concrete pathologies operating in the sexual abuse of children and the holocaust cannot be adequately understood without reference to the denial of and opposition to God, then a secular understanding of the world cannot properly exclude God *on its own terms* (i.e. from within its own interpretive framework). In other words, if secular discourses fail to incorporate adequately into themselves reference to

⁹ *BTS*, p51. It should be clear now why McFadyen’s thought was placed between Frei’s Types 3 and 4 in Chapter 1 below.

¹⁰ *BTS*, p52.

¹¹ *BTS*, p52.

the activity of the triune God, this is a failure, not according to theological discourse, but according to secular disciplines' own truth.

The main difference in method from his earlier work can be seen in a different kind of dialogue, or conversation, as he now tends to call it. In McFadyen's earlier work, there was definitely a concern to maintain the distinctness of theological and secular discourse, and for each to inform and be criticised by the other. But in his later work, it is *by* informing and critiquing the other that the distinctness of each discourse is maintained. The distinctness of theological discourse is maintained by, not in spite of, engaging with secular discourse. We will now listen to the secular voices, notably, without any explicit reference to theology.

3. *Secular Analyses of Two Concrete Pathologies*

In this section, attention will be directed towards McFadyen's reading of secular analyses of two concrete pathologies: the sexual abuse of children and the holocaust. McFadyen's aim is to give phenomenological descriptions of these pathologies on their own terms, without bringing them into explicit relation to theology. This engagement is not an attempt to offer a straightforward representation of secular descriptions, but a constructive engagement in which an attempt is made to understand the concrete situations described and analysed. The later theological account will be tested against these pathologies.

3.1 The Sexual Abuse of Children

McFadyen does not attempt to describe 'the' experience of childhood sexual abuse, but to offer an account of the core, pathological dynamic in which sexually abused children are trapped. We will begin with the definition he offers:

Children are sexually abused when they are involved in sexual activity, are exposed to sexual stimuli or are used as sexual stimuli by anybody significantly older than they are.¹²

An important factor in this definition is that the abuser is 'significantly older' than the child, not necessarily an adult. Significant age-difference is a necessary and sufficient condition for sexual involvement to constitute abuse. This is because of differentials in knowledge, understanding, physical strength, social power, and status. In other words, whenever there is sexual activity where these differentials are significant, it is impossible for the involvement not to be exploitative, even if the child appears to be consensual. The main task of a definition of child abuse is to render criteria by which behaviour may be classified and recognised as sexually abusive,¹³ whereas a description aims at understanding the pathological dynamic, and this is what McFadyen is concerned to do. The former tends to focus on acts of abuse, and the latter is better thought of in terms of relation.¹⁴

¹² *BTS*, p59. 'Sexual activity' can be defined as "anything that would count as such if transacted between adults" (p59n.). It is important to note that this does not require the abuser to intend or achieve sexual stimulation although this is often the case. To make stimulation a necessary condition would preclude many possible instances of abuse, such as the abuser not gaining sexual stimulation. It would also make the classification of abuse dependent upon the abuser's motivation and turn attention away from the child. Similarly, physical abuse is not to be made the primary and controlling factor in defining sexual abuse as there are forms which involve no tactile contact, for example, masturbating in front of the child or invoking the child to masturbate in front of him, exposure to pornography or others' sexual organs, viewing others engaged in sexual activity, receiving obscene telephone calls, being photographed for the sexual use of others (*BTS*, p60; McFadyen, 'Healing the Damaged', pp92-92; 93n).

¹³ On the significance of a definition in cases of abuse see McFadyen, Hanks, and Adams, 'Ritual Abuse: A Definition'.

¹⁴ *BTS*, p60; McFadyen, 'Healing the Damaged', esp. pp92-94; McFadyen, 'The Abuse of the Family', p105.

The key factor is not that the core dynamic of abuse is that of a distorted and distorting relationality (even though this occurs long after all physical trauma has healed), but that abuse encloses and traps the child in its distortions. This is brought about in large part by the pathological dynamics of abuse to which we now turn.¹⁵ Following McFadyen's organisation of similar material elsewhere, this will be presented under three main headings: damaging relationality, the bonds of secrecy, and internalising the damaging energy – restructuring identity.¹⁶

Damaging relationality

The key dynamics can be presented as follows:

1. *Isolation and seclusion.* The physical, psychological, and social presence of others is the most effective constraint in a situation of potential abuse. The child has to be isolated from the care, concern, and interference from other adults for abuse to occur. The physical seclusion of the place and time from other adults is the most simple means of isolating the child. This, however, is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for abuse to occur, since some abusers are willing to abuse in public space. Psychological and social isolation are especially important if abuse is to occur over a significant period of time. The power of other adults to take effective action must be incapacitated or circumvented by removing the knowledge-base for action. Where psychological and social isolation occurs, physical seclusion is less

¹⁵ This section draws extremely heavily from *BTS*, pp62-78.

¹⁶ McFadyen, 'Healing the Damaged'. James Poling's fourfold summary of the dynamics of abuse bears a striking similarity to McFadyen's analysis: "1. A potential offender needed to have some motivation to abuse a child sexually. 2. The potential offender had to overcome internal inhibitions against acting on that motivation. 3. The potential offender had to overcome external impediments to committing sexual abuse. 4. The potential offender or some other factor had to undermine or overcome a child's possible resistance to the sexual abuse." (James N. Poling, *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991, p62).

relevant as the child is already isolated from frameworks of social meaning and action, and so the abuser's actions are left unchallenged.¹⁷

2. *False normality.* The differentials in knowledge and understanding enable the abuser to construct a false, but persuasive, perception of normality. Abuse might be presented as normal, and is therefore indistinguishable from non-abusive behaviour and relationships. This may happen by incorporating abuse into the everyday routines of washing, changing, and going to the toilet. Because these hygienic procedures take place in private and the touching of genitals is often necessary, this effectively shields knowledge of the abuse from other adults, if not making it appear normal to them. To the child, this has the effect of presenting it as normal to wider social norms and conventions, if not explicitly giving permission for the 'hygienic' tasks to be performed. Consequently, the abuse may draw parasitically from the wider situation and authority structure for its own legitimisation.¹⁸

3. *Illusions of consent.* Where the abuser had convinced the child that she has consented in some way to the abuse, the child internalises feelings of guilt, blame, and responsibility, and therefore is inextricably bound into the realities of the abusive relationship, and subsequently inhibited from disclosing to others. The appearance of consent is often initiated 'by degrees', and so the boundary between acceptable and abusive behaviour is blurred. There is a gradual increment in behaviour, and so no great boundary-lines are crossed between one time to the next, but there is a significant shift when comparing the first and last acts.

¹⁷ "An abuser might sit a child on his lap, in contact with his erection, or might find a way of touching breasts, buttocks or genitals, even inserting fingers into anus or vagina, in a way which is either hidden from the direct view of others or appear to others to be a social, even loving embrace" (BTS, p64n).

¹⁸ Where abusive acts are incorporated into well-known games such as tickling, or ring-o'-roses, in ignorance of what is really occurring, this may be explicitly legitimated by other adults – 'I used to enjoy that when I was your age'; 'that is Daddy's way of showing he loves you'; 'get up to the bathroom, Daddy is waiting for you' (BTS, p65).

4. *Wanting a good relationship.* The abuser tends to be already in a situation where the bonds of the relationship are stronger than with other adults. Where the relationship to the abuser has become the main functioning source for emotional nourishment, the cost of disclosing the abuse may seem unbearable if not an acceptable pay-off when weighed against other benefits.

5. *Rewards.* Emotional entrapment may occur by the offering of inducements (money, sweets, etc.) to the child immediately prior to the abuse. This implies a contract between the abuser and the child, for which the inducement is a fee for performing this act. The child is trapped by his desire for the reward, which may even lead to the child initiating the abuse and foster the illusion that he is consenting to the abuse. By offering inducements the abuser creates a confused conflation between wanting the abuse and desiring the reward, and further creates the appearance of consent, especially where this is accompanied by the physiological effects of sexual arousal.

The Bonds of Secrecy

Where the abuser is not a stranger, he has to ensure continuing secrecy.¹⁹ The child is literally 'bound in silence'. This is brought about in two main ways:

1. *Threats.* Threats concerning the consequences of disclosure establish a claim on the child in times and places distanced from the context of abuse (violence,

¹⁹ On the lack of use of inclusive language I follow McFadyen and quote: "Since the vast majority of abusers are male, it would not serve the interests of truth to hide that fact by using inclusive language. So, although it is true that the relatively small number of female abusers are incorporated into this male semantic reference and rendered invisible, ... the use of male pronouns is more than simply generic. The use of gender-inclusive language... would overexpose them [female abusers]... . [According to Poling's research, about 80–95% of sexual violence is perpetrated by men (Poling, *The Abuse of Power*, p62)]. In referring to children who are abused, however, I do alternate between male and female pronouns, even though the best statistics show a preponderance of female victims. To use the female pronouns exclusively for victims and survivors, however, might create the dangerous and misleading impression that abuse of boys is atypical, both quantitatively and qualitatively." (BTS, p60n).

family break-up, imprisonment of the breadwinner, other's emotional reactions, etc.). The abuser communicates to the child that he is more powerful than they, even when no longer in physical proximity. This fear often remains even for adult survivors. Because the child feels threatened fear of disclosure may invade other relationships and therefore weaken the bonds of trust in others, whilst strengthening the bond to the abuser. The child's fear of the consequences is all that is necessary to inhibit disclosure.

2. *Secrecy*. The injunction to secrecy closes off the immediate context of abuse from other contexts, intensifying the isolation, strengthening the bonds to the abuser, and weakening those to others. Secrecy is designed to prevent others becoming aware of the information. However, the social isolation effected by the injunction to secrecy, not only prevents the child from bringing the information to public expression, but more significantly, inhibits her processes of understanding, judging, and evaluating the information represented by the abuse. Consequently the child may be unable to understand what has happened to her, or, to understand it as abuse. Secrecy interdicts her access to other frameworks of meaning which would enable her to process and interpret the information.

Internalising the Damaging Energy – Restructuring Identity

Damaging relationality, and the bond of secrecy have significant implications for future identity. Some key factors can be summarised:

1. *Internalising abuse*. The threats and injunction to secrecy give the child the illusion of power – he will bear responsibility for the consequence of disclosure. Often this is read back into the abusive situation: 'If I am in control of the secret and

fear its exposure, then I must be responsible for the abuse'.²⁰ Because the child's confusion cannot be resolved with recourse to public frameworks of meaning, it is rationalised and internalised in the form of distorted-beliefs concerning her identity, perhaps especially that the abuse is the fault of the child. The rationality of the abuse is substituted with the (distorted) rationality of the child's internal structures and frameworks of meaning. Consequently, the child's recourses for survival permit the abuse to carry on, and further confirm and embed its reality. Because the child cannot prevent the abuse and is inhibited from disclosing it, there is an organisation of identity around the core reality of abuse. Abuse then becomes the prime informant of identity, but does so in a hidden and distorting way.

2. *Four dynamics.* Four further dynamics are identifiable in situations of child abuse: a) *Traumatic sexualisation.* Childhood sexual abuse introduces children to sexual activity inappropriately and prematurely (psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, and physiologically). It may then become a significant factor in shaping the development of sexuality, and survivors may in the future become confused about their sexual identities, rules, codes, and norms applying to sexual behaviour in wider society. b) *Betrayal.* All sexual abuse includes an element of betrayal (of trust), most notably from the abuser, but also from other adults who treat the disclosure with disbelief. c) *Powerlessness.* Abuse is experience of extreme powerlessness. d) *Stigmatisation.* The abuser's injunctions to prevent disclosure tend to negate estimations of the child's worth and communicate an expectation of public stigmatisation. This tends to be experienced in terms of deep-seated guilt and shame, low self-esteem.

²⁰ BTS, p71.

3.ii The Holocaust

Central to McFadyen's reading of secular theories about the holocaust, is the idea that the policy of genocide was arrived at gradually as other policies proved to be inadequate for solving the 'Jewish problem'.²¹ It was not a programmatic intention of Hitler's from the start. The idea of genocide arose as a result of pragmatic and instrumental reason, not theoretical deliberation. However, the racial ideology of the Nazis does form the context within which Germany in general believed that there was a 'Jewish problem' to be solved by the action of the state.

The key difference between the holocaust and most other forms of violent anti-Semitism is that the holocaust did not depend upon the incitement of popular emotion in the form of violent blood-lust,²² nor the retreat of a modern, civilised nation into the barbaric irrationality of a previous time. Rather, the holocaust was understood as being a highly rational project for the betterment of society. As a triumph of rationality in planning and action it stands in deep continuity with the optimism of modernity.²³ Any element that did not fit the dream of a perfectly rational social order based upon the purity of race was eliminated. Consequently, the mentally handicapped were the first victims as they imposed a burden on the state and families, as well as representing a dilution of the pure, Aryan race.²⁴ All the undesirable elements were exterminated through a rational, bureaucratic,

²¹ This is clearly a contested point amongst historians, but there is significant evidence to support this view. For example, Hitler approved a memorandum from Himmler as late as 25th May 1940, about a plan to expel all Jews to Madagascar. See *BTS*, pp80-82, and p80n for references.

²² This may or may not be true as a general point but there are obvious exceptions which McFadyen does not mention such as the Nuremberg rallies or Kristallnacht.

²³ For his reading of the holocaust, McFadyen is heavily indebted to Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.

²⁴ On the 'Jewish question', i.e., why the Jews posed a problem for Nazi ideology, see *BTS*, pp85-88 and references.

administrative, and therefore 'civilised', legal process. The phenomenological dynamics will now be briefly unpacked.²⁵

1. *Rational problem solving: means, not ends.* Analogous to any other modern, centralised government, once broad policy goals were formulated, the matter was handed over to technical and administrative (rational) advisers to devise the most expedient and efficient means for implementation. Once a policy has reached this stage, it is no longer a matter of subjective opinion and values, rather, it is now a matter of the 'objectivity' of rational instrumentalisation of policy. Any debate about the policy is now about the 'means' of implementation, not the 'ends'.²⁶ At this very early stage of the procedure, to object on personal, moral, or subjective grounds would be to introduce 'non-rational' elements into the equation, and therefore such objections do not play a part. McFadyen cites Bauman:

Physical extermination was chosen as the most feasible and effective means to the original, and newly expanded, end. The rest was the matter of co-operation between various departments of state bureaucracy; of careful planning, designing proper technology and technical equipment, budgeting, calculating and mobilising necessary resources: indeed, the matter of dull bureaucratic routine. ... [*T]he choice of physical extermination as the right means to the task of Entfernung [tr. elimination, expulsion, removal] was a product of routine bureaucratic procedures: means-ends calculus, budget balancing, universal rule application.*²⁷

There is a shift of attention from the ends of action to the means, which is accompanied by a further shift in the criteria for evaluating action – from the moral to the instrumental. Technical-instrumental expertise and bureaucracy now play an ideological function without provision for external or more foundational frameworks of understanding.

2. *Standing by a reasonable policy.* Under the Third Reich, all matters pertaining to the Jews were regulated and governed by a single agency of bureaucratic

²⁵ This section draws heavily from *BTS*, pp88-103.

²⁶ Clearly, identification of the ends is a key factor in the idea of genocide. McFadyen does give some attention to this, but for me to do so would be to deter from the overall aim of the chapter. McFadyen is again closely following Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*.

²⁷ *BTS*, p89, citing Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, pp16f.. (Italics in original).

action. At the same time, German Jews were separated from the biological, psychological, social and geographical bonds of a common community. Again citing Bauman, persons were "[r]educ[ed] like all other objects of bureaucratic management, to pure, quality-free, measurements".²⁸ They were dehumanised. Efficient bureaucracy deals with persons not as subjects but objects. Through the action of a single bureaucratic body, the Jews gradually disappeared as human subjects, and furthermore, a 'rational', 'objective' process encouraged other Germans to put aside their moral scruples in favour of the rationality of state action.

3. *Rationally compelled to dirty work.* The moral inhibitions and sense of disgust of those charged with the face-to-face killing had to be overcome to the extent that this was actually a great concern for Himmler. Five main factors are evident. First, there was the conviction that the task was a necessary, hygienic, and sanitary undertaking carried out amidst the national emergence of total war. Second, concern was shifted away from the victims to the burden of pity borne by the perpetrators. The distastefulness of the task was a sign of its necessity in the pursuit of the greater good. Third, as a cog in the bureaucratic machine, it was a burden placed on the perpetrator by a chain of command, hence, blame and accountability were shifted.²⁹ Fourth, individual taste and will were understood as matters to be overcome in the fulfilment of a greater, objective principle. Consequently, this was a matter of destiny for which the responsibility lay elsewhere. Fifth, many killing units developed an ideological component (especially loyalty to one's peers) to their willingness to

²⁸ BTS, p92, citing Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p103.

²⁹ In a very different setting, Yale University, Stanley Milgram demonstrated many of these dynamics in a highly controversial experiment. The experiment demonstrated (rather too effectively for comfort) both the ease with which people could apparently inflict considerable pain on complete and innocent strangers, as well as their readiness to evade responsibility. The similarity between the pathological dynamics between the perpetrators of death camps, and the American public at Yale University is striking. See Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*, New York: Harper & Row, 1974; referenced in Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995, pp173f.

discharge such duties. Not carrying out an individual's duty would place a greater burden of the responsibility on a colleague, and carrying out such tasks together would further embed group loyalty and pride.

4. *Further separation of means and ends – participating at a distance.* The 'final solution' required the participation of vast numbers of ordinary Germans in ordinary occupations (railway employees, accountants, engineers, etc.). Their tasks looked the same as their counterparts in other countries, and as their own had done prior to the incorporation of genocide. Consequently, many of the participants in the 'final solution' found it difficult to appreciate the ends to which their work was being directed, and furthermore, if they could have, it would have been hard for them to take responsibility for them on account of the bureaucratic process. A worker's task is functionally separated from other tasks and may therefore never require them to meet or understand what others are doing. In many ways the meaning of one's activity is hidden since meaning derives in large part from an understanding of the whole. Bureaucratic action draws attention away from the *telos* to one's own specialisation. Furthermore, since there is an infinite regress of responsibility, both up and down the hierarchy, personal responsibility is simply not locatable. Hence even those confronted with the face-to-face killing experience the act as the impersonal means of instrumentation of others' intentions. Morality is sequestered by technical-instrumental criteria and right and wrong become defined in terms of whether or not a person is doing his/her job efficiently.

5. *Incorporating the rationality of victims.* The creation of a rationally regulated world invites the belief that one may influence the outcome through the use of one's own rational resources. In the early stages, the Nazis' legislative measures of deportation were considered by some to be potentially beneficial since they bore some

resemblance to Zionist hopes. Many Jews, therefore, actively co-operated with their implementation. The Nazis deliberately incorporated the reasoning and willing of their victims, and in many instances, offered apparent authority to Jewish leaders to manage affairs in the ghettos. Securing Jewish compliance and administration in the ghettos was a much more efficient means of implementing anti-Jewish measures than deploying other Germans to do the same work. To the Jewish mind, they continued to be functioning under the conditions of normal life under abnormal conditions of separation. Jewish leaders co-operated out of a sense of responsibility for their communities in the hope that they could help administer the measures in a more humane manner. The fact that the Jewish leaders' power and responsibilities (within the parameters set by the Nazis) were formally total made it more difficult to recognise that they were materially powerless. Without the knowledge of the Nazis' ultimate intention and the relation to other major objectives, it was impossible for Jewish leaders to calculate the 'rationality' of various options. Rationality again becomes a focus on the means. This dynamic was posed even more starkly in the death camps where the optimisation of self-interest – one's own survival – usually meant the decrease of another's chances (passive collusion).

Although McFadyen's interpretation of the pathological dynamics of the sexual abuse of children and the holocaust is not comprehensive, and my summary even less so, it does not need to be. McFadyen has captured some of the core pathological dynamics of these situations as stated by 'secular discourse', even if there is much more to be said. And McFadyen's aim is not so much to write a book on child abuse and the holocaust as to use these concrete situations as test cases for the descriptive and explanatory power of the doctrine of sin. Having set out

McFadyen's reading of the pathological dynamics of two concrete situations as offered by 'secular discourse', we now turn to McFadyen's theological reading.

4. *The Significance of the Will*

McFadyen's primary concern is to assess whether the doctrine of sin can function as a test of our ability to speak of God in relation to the world, and furthermore, provide greater explanatory and descriptive power than secular discourse in relation to two concrete pathologies. Two requirements have to be fulfilled from both sides of the debate if the test is to be adequate. First, from the side of secular discourse, a significant and specific dimension of the pathological dynamic needs to be identified that is common to both, but one that does not falsely synthesise the two pathologies and consideration of which leads to the whole. Second, from the theological side, in the absence of a core common to all doctrines of sin a move back to the formal essentiality of the language of sin must be made – that it is a theological language, i.e., if God is not brought into the conversation it has failed as a theory and as a theological language. For this task, McFadyen chooses the phenomenon of human willing.

From the theological side, the general theory of sin that affords the best chance of testing the theological referent of sin-talk is that which most forcefully resists translation into secular terms – the doctrine of original sin as traditionally construed.³⁰ The doctrine of original sin is possibly the most offensive doctrine to modernity, precisely because it chafes against the central axiom of the primacy and inalienability of freedom. Because of this, much modern theology has dropped, or at least

³⁰ McFadyen has developed this at length (*BTS*, Chapter 2). As it does not fall at the heart of the conversation between theological and secular discourse, I have not developed it.

weakened, the doctrine, which is generally to be interpreted in moral, rather than theological terms. With the traditional understanding of original sin, the doctrine necessarily retains its theological character and therefore the ability to speak of an intrinsic relation between God and the world. Insofar as that distinctness is theological, the results are potentially generalisable for all doctrines of sin. In short, *the test is for the explanatory and descriptive power of an understanding of sin that is not reducible to the moral.*

However, the doctrine of original sin is too general to function as a model amenable to empirical testing, so an even more localised reference needs to be found. On the basis of its conflict with moral frames of reference which tend to rely on modernity's axiom of freedom, McFadyen identifies the bondage of the will. This is specific enough to be amenable to concrete testing by asking whether people are personally incorporated into the pathological dynamic through their free willing, or through their operative (but not free) willing. At this stage, McFadyen is asking about the descriptive adequacy of a moral framework of understanding, and whether such a framework is sufficient to describe the nature of the pathology without explicitly theological reference. And so we now (re)turn to the concrete pathologies.

4.i The Sexual Abusers of Children

In order to examine the nature of pathological willing in cases of sexual abuse, McFadyen shifts the focus from the child to the abuser although this is by no means

necessary.³¹ According to McFadyen's research, the incidence of physical or emotional abuse in the pre-history of sexual abusers is high.³² He writes:

The presence of a history of abuse in the background of a significant proportion of abusers strongly suggests that their own disposition to abuse is not an artefact of their pure internality, having no other explanation than their arbitrary free decision. Rather, the personal history of these abusers seems to have shaped their basic patterns of intentionality, their character or personal identity, the frameworks within which will operates. ... abuse seems to be a means for resolving issues of personal identity that reflect distorted identity structures sedimented through histories of distorted interaction.³³

In addition to manifesting McFadyen's clear indebtedness to his earlier work on theological anthropology, McFadyen's main point is evident: the sexual abuse of children does not occur in a social and psychological vacuum.³⁴ Sexual abusers are, to borrow McFadyen's title, 'bound to sin' in and through their will being caught up in the pathological dynamic.

Few abusers appear to possess an innate sexual attraction to children, and consequently, whilst the means for resolution of the identity issues has become sexualised, neither they, nor the issues being resolved are intrinsically sexual. In the cases of those who do experience a prior sexual interest in children, imaginative rehearsal of sexual acts whilst masturbating significantly shapes and conditions the willingness to realise the acts of the imagination. In both cases, the abuser is emphatically not in a position to make a free, neutral decision, but rather is in the grip of a dynamic beyond rational decision making, similar to those experienced by people struggling with addiction. The abuser is already 'bound'.

³¹ It is also evident in the abused child. See *BTS*, pp121-125.

³² *BTS*, p114. By way of contrast: "For men there is no clear correlation between childhood experiences of abuse and becoming an adult perpetrator. Some men who have been victims of sexual violence do not become perpetrators. ... [Whereas,] [s]ome men who have not been victims of sexual violence become perpetrators of sexual violence on others." (Poling, *The Abuse of Power*, p61).

³³ *BTS*, p114.

³⁴ Whether or not there is a correlation between childhood experiences of abuse and becoming an adult perpetrator, there is a strong correlation between experiences of abuse and prostitution and pimping. Current social research statistics indicate that 80% of women in prostitution in the United States have suffered childhood sexual abuse. Many people working with prostitutes estimate somewhere between 90-100%. (Brock, and Thistlethwaite, *Casting Stones*, p26; see also Chapter 6; and pp4; 8; 29-30; 184-185).

However, acting on the desire to abuse only reinforces the ties, even if actual abuse to another does not occur. McFadyen writes: "Through masturbation, the experience of arousal by children may be reinforced in a way which desensitises potential abusers to feelings of guilt or shame which might act as impediments to active willing, so more deeply embedding the will in this orientation".³⁵ Once abuse has occurred, the physiological effects on abusers of their behaviour are likely to be reinforcing and habit-forming. The force of habit, which may be reinforced through imagination whilst masturbating, is likely to be accompanied by a displacement of active willing. In other words, a psychological dependence can be created which will increase the sense that the sexual behaviour is unwilled.

In short, it is clear from McFadyen's analysis that the will of the abuser becomes entrapped in the dynamic of abuse, and furthermore, was not 'free' prior to abusing.³⁶ This is especially clear in the incidence of abusers who do have a background of abuse, which as we have already seen, significantly affects willing and identity forming processes.

4.ii Willing the Holocaust

McFadyen identifies a similar operative dynamic in the holocaust. In Nazi Germany, the elimination of the Jews by mass murder was actively willed. However, "the willing of genocide was itself shaped and formed through the process of planning and implementing solutions to the 'Jewish problem'".³⁷ The will was not formed independently from the social context (i.e., in a 'neutral' sphere), rather, it was immersed in and inseparable from concrete reality.

³⁵ *BTS*, p115.

³⁶ Again I note that the will of the child is also incorporated into the pathological dynamic (*BTS*, pp121-125).

³⁷ *BTS*, p116.

In short, it was not that genocide happened without Hitler's and other's will, or even against them, but that the willingness to conceive and implement the Final Solution was born out of a prior commitment to address the Jewish problem through less drastic actions.³⁸ Additionally, the possibility of the willing of genocide belongs to the instrumentalisation of anti-Jewish measures. With each successive measure, the will was further conditioned to accept the next. In McFadyen's words, "with each incremental commitment, it was all the harder to separate the will from the gradually unfolding logic of genocide as the Final Solution".³⁹ Or again: "[the] incrementation in planning and action helped cloud *what* it was that one was willing and the *point* at which one willed it".⁴⁰

Willing was further incorporated into the process through the bureaucratic means previously outlined. The shift to means-centred action meant that action was assessed according to intra-systemic criteria of technical-instrumental rationality concerned only with the means, not the ends. Willing ceased to be active in relation to the ends of action, attending only to the efficient execution of the means – the will was redirected. A similar dynamic is also evident in the killing units and the victims.⁴¹

In both the situations of child abuse and the holocaust, the will is caught up and incorporated into the pathological dynamic. Although my summary of McFadyen's account of the will is sketchy, the following key points can be identified as common to both:

³⁸ *BTS*, p116.

³⁹ *BTS*, p117.

⁴⁰ *BTS*, p117.

⁴¹ *BTS*, pp119-121; 125-126.

1. McFadyen has effectively demonstrated *the descriptive inadequacy of any simplistic notion of willing as the exercise of completely free decision* and of the underlying notion of the will as a neutral organ of arbitrary choice.

2. *Willing is bound up with the situation, and the situation permeates the will* to such an extent that it is descriptively inadequate to name personal pathology without also naming the overarching pathological dynamic in which the person is caught up through his/her own willing.

3. *Willing is inseparable from the processes and accidents of person-formation.* Distortions in willing evidence distortions at the core of personal identity in the basic pattern of intentionality.

4. *Willing may become pathologically habituated* by incorporation into concrete, social, and material processes of action and by the trajectory of past action. It is not merely a personal dynamic, but arises out of being incorporated into pathological dynamics which are inter-, trans-, and supra-personal.

5. *Willing may become confused, disorientated, and redirected* through dynamics that are not merely personal, which may also lead to further confusion about the construal of reality.

To return briefly to the issues raised at the beginning of this section, a moral language (secular discourse), especially with its indebtedness to modernity's priority of freedom in ascertaining responsibility, is descriptively inadequate to the complex reality of willing in the two concrete pathological situations (that the will is 'bound' -- to sin). There are important aspects of willing that have come to the fore in this discussion which fall beyond the boundaries of moral language, that is, the boundary between the subjective and objective, the personal and impersonal. As McFadyen has shown, the phenomenon of willing does not deal with a passively received pathogen,

but an active contribution of the self that escapes the criteria of moral evaluation because of the complexity of the pathological dynamic which draws in the self in its entirety as well as non-personal structures.

At the risk of repetition, let me try to put this more clearly. According to the criteria and standards of judgement afforded by moral frames of reference, we only sin personally where we have sufficient freedom for self-determination in action – where freedom means a freedom from the determining influences of internal and external pressures. It is only when I enjoy this freedom, when I live and act in my own power (autonomously), i.e., when my will is free, that I am responsible and culpable for my actions. When impersonal forces are so great that I no longer act voluntarily (e.g. addiction, social factors, hunger, etc.), I am no longer culpable. In other words, even whilst recognising the complexity of the factors in play, there is a stark choice:

Either internal, personal dynamics are potent relative to other forces and dynamics, *or* I am overpowered by them. *Either* I have personal power, exercise will and am therefore culpable, *or* I am the innocent victim of my situation, irresistible drives or the superior, coercive force of others.⁴²

McFadyen has argued that the descriptive and explanatory power of such a framework is inadequate for understanding. There is a more complex interrelation between internal and external factors than is allowed for in this dichotomy. In these concrete pathologies, the will is not overpowered, nor is it disembedded from action, and action does not occur against the will. Rather, personal and extra-personal dynamics co-operate, and so will remains embodied in personal action.

⁴² *BTS*, p132. (Italics in original). Both Drs. Michael Partridge and David Cook have pointed out to me on separate occasions that McFadyen is constructing a 'straw-man' argument here. There is a far broader and more complex range of secular accounts of the will than McFadyen acknowledges. Additionally, many secular accounts of the will are virtually indistinguishable from Christian accounts. Compare for instance, Book VII (and III.i) of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (London: Penguin, 1976), with Chapters 6 and 7 of St Paul's *Letter to the Romans*. Marx, Freud, or many contemporary philosophers might also serve as examples. This will be picked up again in the critique in the body of the text.

The traditional doctrine of original sin recognises the dialectic between the active contribution of the person and what is received as a consequence of situatedness. And so, we can identify the first positive contribution of what is still at this stage a loosely theological account to secular discourse: *the doctrines of original sin and the bound will offer greater explanatory and descriptive power to the complexities of these pathologies than a non-theological framework allows.*

However, thus far, it is not inconceivable that such an account of the will could be offered by secular discourse (if modern assumptions about the nature of freedom were abandoned), albeit in different language. What remains to be seen is the specifically theological content and context of the hypothesis, and consequently, the explanatory power of *theological* frames of reference in relation to the mode of personal participation in the pathologies.

5. An Unlikely Alliance

McFadyen finds support for the complex interplay between person and situation in both feminist theology and Augustine. So that we don't lose sight of the big picture, that is, McFadyen's conversation between theological and secular discourse, we will focus on the 'bare bones' of the relevant chapters in his book. In doing this, particularly with Augustine, we will see the distinctive contribution of theology to these pathologies more clearly.

5.1 Feminist Theologies of Sin

Much feminist theology, with its concern for issues relating to identity, integrity, power, autonomy and relationality has tended to focus on the theological

tradition's insistence on pride as the paradigmatic sin.⁴³ Pride is generally understood as the idolisation of the self, or, the worship of the self.⁴⁴ Insofar as pride is the attempt to be like God, the theological tradition rightly interprets it as both refusal to be a creature and to acknowledge God as God.⁴⁵

To view sin as having a paradigmatic form is implicitly to invoke a normative standard of reference for the good, over-and-against which pathological deviations may be discerned. And so, if the paradigmatic form of sin is pride – self-assertion to the point of idolisation – then the good which it opposes is self-abasement to the point of self-abnegation. If this is accepted, then according to the standard feminist critique women are innocent. For many women, their sense of self is submerged in relationships to others whose identities, desires, and needs displace their own to the extent that there is a dissipation of the self – a collapse of the self into relationships.⁴⁶ This phenomenon has been referred to in much literature as a 'loss of self'.⁴⁷

Most feminist theologians agree that pride does name the stereotypically 'male' sin, and consequently, the corollary of 'male' pride is the 'female' virtue of submissiveness or self-surrender.⁴⁸ They also agree about the appropriateness of naming pride as sin and they do not dispute the tradition's characterisation of pride.

⁴³ As we shall see in Chapter 5, Karl Barth makes this mistake although not to the extent that is often suggested (see Kathryn Greene-McCreight, 'Gender, Sin and Grace: Feminist Theologies Meet Karl Barth's Hamartiology', *SJT*, 50/4, 1997, pp415-432). Examples of other modern theologians who do the same are: Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II, London: SCM Press, 1978; Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, I, London: Nisbet, 1941; Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1939; and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, II, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994 (all referenced in *BTS*, p135n – see also for references to feminist theology on pride; also McFadyen, 'Sins of Praise', p37n).

⁴⁴ On this see esp. *BTS*, pp216-219; McFadyen, 'Sins of Praise', pp36f.; also McFadyen, 'Sin'.

⁴⁵ As such, McFadyen rightly identifies idolatry as the root and paradigmatic form of sin, of which pride is an instance. (McFadyen, 'Sins of Praise', p36).

⁴⁶ *BTS*, pp136-137.

⁴⁷ However, it is to be emphasised that 'loss of self' and 'sloth' is not the experience of *all* women as shown in Susan B. Thistlethwaite, *Sex, Race and God: Christian Feminism in Black and White*, New York: Crossroad, 1989, cited in Greene-McCreight, 'Gender, Sin and Grace'.

⁴⁸ It is argued that in practice this has meant women are instructed not to resist abuse and oppression as this would result in pride.

What is in dispute is the emphasis which pride has received in the theological tradition.

In response to the tradition's emphasis on pride, feminist theologians have identified the 'loss of self' as sloth. Traditionally, sloth refers to acts of omission arising out of wilful indolence or indifference.⁴⁹ As such, it has often been construed as a form of 'overblown selfhood', that is, a self which is so turned in on and satisfied by itself that it cannot and will not stir itself to action.⁵⁰ Sloth is, therefore, a less active way of idolising the self and is consequently a form of pride. Consequently, it "denotes a mode of personal agency".⁵¹ The significance of feminist theologies of sin for McFadyen's aim now becomes clear:

Feminist reinterpretation of sloth represents... an attempt to reclaim a personal and active dimension in the description of women's experience, *without denying the sense in which they are victims of oppression*.⁵²

The key in feminist interpretations of sloth is a shift from an understanding of sloth as passive to an active form of personal agency. Put differently, sloth names a mode of personal participation in oppression exercised by victims in relation to two different objects: selfhood and patriarchy. Verb-usage by feminists testifies to this shift: a) failing, hiding, refusing, abdicating, abnegating, denying, fleeing; b) participating, being complicit, acquiescing in, accepting, consenting to, complying, and cooperating with.⁵³ Analogous to the discussion of willing in the previous section, the intention in using these verbs is to indicate both the experienced reality of

⁴⁹ It is not insignificant that the original list from which the 'seven deadly sins' were taken contained eight. 'Sloth', in the list of seven, was taken to include both *acedia*, apathy or boredom, and *tristitia*, melancholy and dejection, which occurred in the list of eight. This obviously casts a different light on the "tradition's" interpretation of sloth. For a more extensive discussion see Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, Chapter 3, esp. pp41-48.

⁵⁰ Cf. Luther's characterisation of sin as *incurvatus in se*. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Romans*, Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971, esp. pp291f.; 313; 345. See also Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/2: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000, pp403f., esp. p407.

⁵¹ *BTS*, p140.

⁵² *BTS*, p141 (italics in original).

⁵³ See *BTS*, pp141-142n for refs.

oppression, and that the victims are personally active as subjects. In other words, the condition and mode of subjectivity is affected, and there is a correspondence and conformity of subjective intentionality with the external realities of oppression. In short, women participate personally in their own oppression as subjects (insofar as intentionality and will are actively (dis)orientated under patriarchy).

So, what have feminist theologies of sin actually contributed to the doctrine of sin? The problem feminist theologians found with the theological tradition's overemphasis on pride as the paradigmatic sin was that it neglected the experiences of many women.⁵⁴ The key response by feminist theologians was to name the corresponding dissipation of self as sin. This is a highly significant move. In naming a complement to what is traditionally claimed to be universally extensive, feminist theology achieves a shift in the way sin is being understood. Naming sloth as sin fundamentally alters the normative frame of reference that underpins the identification of pride as what sin essentially is. This happens in two ways.

First, it alters the tradition's understanding of pride because, if self-loss is sin, then not all forms of pride are sinful. Pride therefore undergoes a reinterpretation in the light of an understanding of sloth, the boundaries of which are redefined more narrowly than traditionally has been the case. The key change is that victims are

⁵⁴ To this extent, feminist theologies of sin use empirical analysis (secular discourse) to criticise traditional doctrines of sin. One excellent example of this on a related matter is Brock's and Thistlethwaite's study of prostitution, which confirms McFadyen's analysis of feminist doctrines of sin except in one important respect. Like McFadyen's account, Brock's and Thistlethwaite's doctrine of sin is rooted in empirical experience of concrete pathologies. However they conclude: "Sin is not a concept adequate to explaining the condition of women and children who are exploited sexually" (*Casting Stones*, p236). They find the traditional language of sin to be inadequate and too limited to describe the pathological dynamics of prostitution preferring instead to draw from the Korean term 'han' which better captures the depths of human suffering. *Han* refers to "the abysmal experience of pain", and contains both active and inactive aspects. In short: "Lacking an idea like *han* and having only the doctrine of sin into which all the pains and ills of the world must be placed, Christian theology has confused sin and *han* and has profoundly distorted our ability to understand the complexities of the human condition" (*Casting Stones*, p238). Like many feminist accounts, Brock's and Thistlethwaite's do not refer sin to a transcendent God, and although rightly critical of the tradition in many respects (e.g. original sin and pride pp247; 251), fail to see the possibilities for a more multifaceted doctrine of sin such as that offered by McFadyen. Chapters 8 and 9 of *Casting Stones* could serve as a useful point of comparison for *BTS*.

empowered to act against oppression, abuse, etc., because failing to assert or protect oneself might prove sinful.

Second, as pride can no longer be interpreted as any assertion of self that rebels against self-abnegation, the normative standard of reference underpinning the discernment of sin undergoes a shift. The goods of which pride deprives one are no longer complementary virtues, but complementary aspects of the same pathology. What feminist theologies of sin do, and this is the key, is relate pride and sloth to a more comprehensive standard of reference, that is, "an understanding of the proper economy of the self in relation".⁵⁵

In feminist theology, it is a vision of 'right relation' that stands as the normative reference against which patriarchy, pride, sloth, and sin are judged.⁵⁶

Consequently:

Sin is that which constricts and restricts human beings from the abundance and plenitude of being-in-relation which is proper to them: that which dissipates, blocks, disorients or counters the dynamics of genuine and full mutuality.⁵⁷

In other words, any power, force, or dynamic (e.g. patriarchy) that sets up a counter dynamic to life in abundance and full mutuality is pathological because it restricts, constricts, and disorients. As feminist analysis shows, disorientation is internalised in a way which binds people to it from within in their deepest intentionalities and is transmitted through internalised structures and processes of interaction. This means that participation in sin remains personal, because personal energy is centrally organised and directed, but also that life-intentionality is subject to an internalised disorientation away from the genuinely good. Sin is therefore to be

⁵⁵ *BTS*, p156.

⁵⁶ This will not be developed here, in part because of the similarities with the next section. See *BTS*, pp156-162.

⁵⁷ *BTS*, p162.

construed in terms of a co-operation between disorientated personal and supra-personal dynamics.

Feminist theologies of sin have further added to the case against the descriptive adequacy of moral frames of reference and given more specifiable content to the hypothesis of the bound will. They move the discussion forward from the previous section in one highly significant respect. It moves beyond the minimum requirements of descriptive adequacy in relation to concrete situations by envisioning the good and articulating a normative standard of reference which sets before us a fuller and richer conception of the potentialities of human life, rather than simply reversing the pathology.⁵⁸

However, although cast in theological language (in a general sense), 'God' is noticeably absent from the picture.⁵⁹ It has therefore made little positive contribution to testing the descriptive power of specifically theological language (in a narrow sense). The account offered could again be developed without explicitly theological reference, although it is notable that the Christian tradition does help bring the notion of willing to expression. But this is why McFadyen turns to Augustine.

⁵⁸ For a succinct example of the key moves that McFadyen identifies in feminist doctrines of sin, see Mary Grey, 'Falling into Freedom: Searching for New Interpretations of Sin in a Secular Society', in *SJT*, 47/2, 1994, pp223-243.

⁵⁹ This is typical of many feminist theologies due to the problematic nature of speaking of an almighty, transcendent, sovereign God for human relations in the fear of becoming hierarchical and enslaving. In other words, "the language of sin is retained, but without its basic grammatical rule of reference to God" (McFadyen, 'Sins of Praise', p38). There are also some important methodological questions that are raised by doing 'theology' in this way. See esp. McFadyen, 'Sins of Praise', pp37-41; also *BTS*, pp162-165.

5.ii Augustine on the Will

McFadyen engages Augustine in the task of concrete testing because Augustine counters a position that has some marked similarities with modern assumptions. Following McFadyen, we will first consider very briefly Pelagius' position and then Augustine's in more detail.⁶⁰

Pelagius believed that freedom in willing and choosing is an inalienable characteristic of the human creature. Will is therefore a pure and neutral organ of free choice. The will's freedom consists in its power to motivate itself out of mutual indifference towards one of a number of different possibilities of action. Consequently, human beings are always in a position of possibility.

In situations of coercion, that is, being forced to do something against one's will, Pelagius still maintained that the freedom of the will is a pure organ of choice insofar as it may still wish for alternative possibilities, albeit without sufficient freedom and power in action to exercise them. In other words, the will retains its inalienable freedom as a formal capacity, even if the person cannot act otherwise. Coercion represents a removal of will from action rather than an act against one's will.

As the will is a pure, neutral organ of free choice we are culpable for failing to stand against the pressure of sinful action. Sin is therefore to be conceived in purely axiological terms. The will cannot be sinful since it is a formal and neutral capacity to orient oneself in action through free choice. Only acts of the will may be sinful. This means that it is always possible (though often difficult) to avoid sinning, and as

⁶⁰ This section is highly indebted to *BTS*, pp167-188.

we are inherently capable of willing and doing the good we are culpable for failure to do so.

In the light of the discussions of the concrete pathologies above, it should be immediately obvious that Pelagius' account of the will is inadequate. The will is not a free and neutral organ of pure choice, nor can willing be reduced to the making of action-guiding, atomised decisions, but is incorporated into the pathological dynamics of the situation. Consequently, Augustine's *theological* response to Pelagius falls at the heart of our concerns.

The key difference between Augustine's and Pelagius' accounts is that Augustine explicitly places his understanding of sin within the context of grace. Pelagius understood the freedom of the will in terms of its capacity to motivate itself to do otherwise, making faith an act of the will. Augustine recognised that this position makes faith a human act and achievement which he believed was contrary to the view of the human situation implied by the Christian understanding of salvation. In contrast to Pelagius, Augustine maintained that grace acts on the human condition from without and results in a radical distortion in our being. Perfection requires something more than self-modification.

For Augustine, the will is re-orientated internally and is therefore motivated and attracted to pursue the good which is a consequence of the gift of faith enacted by the Holy Spirit. The will is made good, not by its own power, but by the action of the Holy Spirit: it is *first* made good by the Spirit, and *then* receives a new orientation towards God and the good. At the same time, Augustine maintains that the good which results from the Spirit's action is also the will's own goodness. The action of the Spirit empowers and reorients the will so that subsequent willing and action do not

happen without the will's own power and active engagement. In other words, Augustine holds necessity and freedom together by arguing that the will is free when it accords with the motivation and desire to pursue the good. Put simply, Augustine maintains both sides: that faith as an act of the will is a personal act under the exercise of personal power and that the experience of being under grace compels the will.

Augustine's ability to maintain both the necessity and freedom of the will rests, in large part, upon a crucial distinction that he makes between 'compulsion' and 'force'. The term 'force' is reserved specifically for describing the interplay of forces between physical objects. Consequently, the compulsion of grace is not something analogous to an irresistible, physical force meeting a moveable object. When an action is forced in this sense, it ceases to be a personal action as the person has become simply a physical object: "Forced action, by this definition, is action *without will*",⁶¹ In a situation of force, will is simply inoperative.

By way of contrast, any action where the person is not reduced to physical objects of interaction is voluntary. Actions that we do unwillingly are also voluntary, by means of willing. This predicament is known as the 'divided will'. Unwilling does not denote absence of will but division of will. Consequently, in a situation of compulsion, there are constraints placed upon the possible courses of action, but insofar as we exercise the will, willing is active and effective albeit constrained. Compulsion does not overcome the will but engages, directs, constrains, and utilises the will. One can find oneself voluntarily compelled to do something willingly, that one would (willingly) have avoided, and therefore, do it unwillingly. Put differently, one's will can be caught up in an orientation (pathological dynamic) which one would not choose, but to which one is compelled to add one's personal energies of willing.

⁶¹ *BTS*, p181. (Italics in original).

Pelagius' understanding of freedom (to make choices in a neutral sphere apart from God's grace) is, for Augustine, not freedom but the will's bondage to sin. Pelagius maintains that the basis of the will's consent is its own independent decision and judgement, independent that is, from God and transcendent criteria. In other words, the standards and criteria of judgement in the position of neutrality can only come from itself. This position can also be called pride – a sin which goes hand-in-hand with optimism that sin has not effected a radical distortion on one's capacities for discerning and judging the good. By way of contrast:

In Augustine's view, the will's freedom consists, not in making autonomous choices (even when they may happen to coincide with the good), but in being so related to the source of goodness that one is motivated permanently, unavoidably and indivisibly in active devotion to it. Thus, he is able to proclaim it a great freedom, indeed, to be able to sin, yet an even greater one to be unable to sin (*non posse peccare*).⁶²

Put differently, Pelagius' concern to secure the will's freedom from any form of constraint including the good resulted in binding the will to sin by requiring it to act with an inadequate representation of the good. For Augustine, a discernment of goodness cannot be derived independently from God. Pelagius' will is freed from the good and therefore freed for sin.

For Augustine, sin is a disorder and disorientation in active intentionality. All sins are therefore acts of the will (although not coterminous with acts or will). With Augustine's understanding of compulsion, he can assert that all active sinning is a necessity under the conditions of inherited original sin, and yet voluntary. The criterion for sin is not an act of the will but *opposition to God*. At this point, we realise why McFadyen chose to engage with Augustine. Because Augustine shows that compelled action involves willing, the dynamics of sin can be seen to have real explanatory and descriptive power, notably, because of an explicitly *theological* account.

⁶² *BTS*, p185.

The relevance of Augustine for the concrete pathologies is that he has demonstrated that, even where sinful action originates from elsewhere (e.g. unwilling sinful action), it compels the will to participate, and draws on its own internal power. The power of sin is therefore internalised in such a way that it distorts the internal dynamics which structure a person's intentionality. Consequently, the person is not only culpable for sinful acts that originate from within, but can become bound internally to the dynamics of sin.

Augustine's understanding of the divided will has shed further light on the dynamics of the will in the concrete pathologies above. In conjunction with feminist theologies of sin, Augustine has added further weight to McFadyen's hypothesis about the nature of the bound will in pathological situations. Even though the compulsion to act is external, the act remains personal and willed because the will is incorporated into the pathological dynamic.

Augustine's account of the will differs from feminist accounts in two important respects. First, Augustine broadens the concept of the voluntary more explicitly than feminist accounts so that all situations in which there is willing are included, even under the conditions of coercion. In other words, there are few, if any, situations which do not involve active and personal engagement. The theological contribution here is that under the conditions of sin, the will is necessarily misdirected away from God and the good and so the very capacity for 'free' choice is already disorientated. As the will is already bound to this disorientation, all willing further embeds the self in it.

Second, since the will is already bound to the pathological dynamics of the situation, it does not have sufficient clarity or potency to free the self from it.

Additionally, the very concept of the good is itself clouded by sin. Sin, for Augustine, is a comprehensive turning away from God and the good which results in the disorientation of life-trajectories and confusion about reality. Healing from sin may therefore, only come from outside the situation. The question is not whether we enjoy formal freedom, but whether we are in bondage to sin or orientated towards the one true source of our freedom. As McFadyen puts it:

the opposite of sin for Augustine is not the good act predicated on the potent freedom of the free (neutral) will, but faith (which issues, not in legal obedience, but a concrete spirit of love). Faith is, by contrast, predicated on the potency of the grace of God in instilling the spirit of faith. Yet faith remains for Augustine voluntary, since it requires the contribution of personal power through consensual willing.⁶³

In summary, many of the core assumptions that are made in secular accounts of pathologies such as the nature of freedom are descriptively inadequate to the concrete pathologies mentioned above. People do not stand outside the situations exercising free choices in a neutral sphere, rather, the pathological dynamics of the situation exercise a disorienting influence on willing. In other words, and this is particularly clear in Augustine's account, a *theological* concept of sin offers a more adequate understanding of concrete pathologies because sin is not understood in terms of an act of human willing derived from voluntaristic actions. Sin cannot be thought of as individual acts of an atomistic agent who exercises 'free' choice in a neutral sphere.

Up to this point, the key theological contributions to secular accounts of the pathologies are: 1) the doctrines of original sin, the bound will, feminist and Augustine's theologies of sin, offer greater explanatory and descriptive power to the complexities of concrete pathologies than a non-theological framework allows; 2) feminist theology articulates a normative standard of reference as a fuller and richer conception of the potentialities of human life, rather than a simple reversal of the

⁶³ *BTS*, p197.

pathology, or returning to the original conditions; 3) Augustine offers an explicitly theological account that locates the discussion of the will in terms of (distorted) relation to God.

6. Normative Standards

Talking about any pathology implies a normative standard of reference or criterion from which the pathology is discerned. That is, we operate with a standard of what should be against which disorder, denial, or disease may be identified. Therefore, every pathology carries with it an implicit characterisation of the good.

When questions of standards are posed – ‘what is abuse seen as abuse of?’; ‘what conception of normal, right, and true humanity is functioning in identifying the holocaust as inhumane?’ – secular discourses tend to be surprisingly weak. McFadyen writes: “Many of the secular discussions of concrete pathology – and, indeed, many discussions of sin – in fact operate with a fairly restricted notion of the good as their normative standard of reference, often reducible to maintenance of normal physiological, emotional or social functioning”.⁶⁴ McFadyen identifies two significant problems with this.⁶⁵ First, secular discourses fail to convey the full depths and significance of the denial and distortion of human flourishing, because they do not have a rich conception of human flourishing. Second, because of this underdeveloped understanding, they give those caught up in the pathological dynamics a restricted sense of what they might hope for. In many cases, this restriction of the good, reinforces the damage caused by the pathological dynamics.

⁶⁴ *BTS*, p200.

⁶⁵ *BTS*, pp200-201.

This is where the most significant contribution that theology can make to secular discourse comes to the fore. McFadyen's aim is to offer "a specifically theological conception of the good, which affords a rich comprehension of the nature of pathology and holds out an enriching apprehension of the good to people caught up in it".⁶⁶ Thus far, McFadyen has built up a cumulative case in favour of the explanatory and descriptive power of the hypothesis that the will is bound to pathologies in which it is situated. At the end of the previous section, we noted that feminist theology articulates a normative standard of reference as a fuller and richer conception of the potentialities of human life, and that Augustine offers an explicitly theological account that locates the discussion of the will in terms of (distorted) relation to God. Additionally, and perhaps more significantly, 'right relation' for Augustine can only be interpreted in terms of relation to God. McFadyen now intends to bring both of these dimensions together by giving an explicitly theological account of a rich notion of human flourishing, and testing whether this can further enrich the understanding of the pathological dynamics discussed thus far.

The foundation for McFadyen's understanding of human flourishing is the doctrine of the Trinity. Because of the similarities between his account of the doctrine here and in *The Call to Personhood*, it will not be repeated.⁶⁷ However, the cross and the resurrection of Jesus operate as an additional focal point for McFadyen and indicate the abundant goodness and plenitude of God. Together they are the source of joy in God, and the standard of normative reference for talking about sin.⁶⁸ Consequently, sin is that which counters the dynamics of God in creation and salvation. Sin is only known in the context of God's active countering of it, that is,

⁶⁶ *BTS*, p201.

⁶⁷ *BTS*, pp206-212. See Chapter 2 above.

⁶⁸ McFadyen does not discuss the power of the cross and resurrection in overcoming sin and death.

working through the damage and brokenness caused by sin in order to reorient the world towards more abundant possibilities that were available hitherto. Sin can only be known in the context of the presence and action of God in the world (cf. Barth).

On the basis of the trinitarian dynamic, the cross and resurrection, McFadyen identifies joy, faith, and worship as the normative standards from which sin is to be judged.⁶⁹ Consequently, we will unpack what McFadyen means by them, and then see whether they work as normative standards for the concrete pathologies described above.

Joy is particularising and intensifies particularity.⁷⁰ Our joys characterise our personhood and life-intentionality. Joy invigorates and directs our concrete living. It goes beyond what is strictly necessary for our physiological and psychological well-being. Joy is excessive, and indicates the finding of abundance beyond what is strictly necessary; it incorporates orientation to oneself and another; it cuts across the usual ways of construing dependence and autonomy, and establishes integrity and uniqueness. Joy is a mode of relationship, both expressive of, and constitutive for, personal identity and integrity. However, 'joy' that is worthy of God has had to go through the cross. Joy does not pretend that there are no crosses, rather, it acknowledges that the crosses of the world are to stand but are to be worked through. The pathological dynamics are reoriented to the abundance and fullness of God. Redemption is emphatically not a return to the original conditions, but forward looking.⁷¹

⁶⁹ *BTS*, pp212-216.

⁷⁰ At this point McFadyen's theology is heavily indebted to David Ford's. See David F. Ford, *The Shape of Living*, London: HarperCollins, 1997; and David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

⁷¹ Elsewhere McFadyen illustrates the contrast between a Christian view and a secular view by pointing out that in the original *Superman* film, after Lois Lane has been killed, she is not resurrected (i.e. re-orientating the person's life-intentionality by working through the chaos of sin and death), rather, Superman flies round the world counter-clockwise to turn back time so she can live again (returning to the original conditions). See McFadyen and Inge, 'Art in a Cathedral'.

Faith involves an expansion and deepening of the dynamic integrity proper to the person. The dynamic being of God is orientated towards filling and fulfilling human beings with their own proper integrity in abundance. The dynamics of human integrity are founded on their 'right relation' to the dynamics of God. Joy in God stretches one to respond to new, fuller, and richer ways of being even more oneself in relation.

If faith is the energising spirit, then *worship* is the active form in which human beings direct all their energies towards the God whose dynamic order is directed towards them and the world. Worship is that active, attentive response to the dynamic order of God. In worship, our own dynamic order or relatedness is blessed, continually opened to, and incorporated into the dynamic order of God.⁷² In the joy of faith and worship, abundance is properly founded within the ecology and economy of God's transforming presence and action. It is not a diminution of human selfhood and freedom, but their proper foundation.

As the normative standards of the good, joy, faith and worship show sin to be a disruption of genuine worship; idolatry. Sin appears in terms that re-echo the above consideration of willing – a disorientation of the will from within countering the orientation to the spirit of faith – that is, a spiritual disorientation of the whole person at the most fundamental level of life-intentionality and desire. Human lives are involved in a disorientation away from the reality of God, others, and the true fulfilment of their being. The situational and relational dynamics within which the person is caught, distort or block the mediation of the dynamics of God. This means that the situational dynamic both asserts itself as an independent power and universal frame of reference, and undermines the conditions for genuine worship of God by

⁷² See McFadyen, and Ford, 'Praise'; and McFadyen and Inge, 'Art in a Cathedral'.

fostering an active misperception of the nature of God's being and identity. In short, wrong worship either has the wrong object or the wrong dynamic.⁷³

McFadyen has now given specifically theological content to the dynamics of the bound will.⁷⁴ His concern is then to test directly the explanatory and descriptive power of this explicitly theological identification in relation to the concrete pathologies outlined above.

To worship is to order one's life around a reality as primary to and constitutive of meaning, worth, truth, and value. One's personal energy is oriented towards this reality as the ground and criterion for active life-intentionality. The object of worship is absolute, and unconditional. It demands exclusive loyalty. In the light of this, McFadyen seeks to discern first, whether the concrete pathologies can be analysed in terms of worship, and second to discover whether such worship is genuine or idolatrous.

1. *Concrete dynamics of worship.* Both the account of the sexual abuse of children and the holocaust offered above represent for McFadyen, "a clear, concrete manifestation of the dynamics pertaining to worship: the direction of all energies towards demands which do not only override, but exclude, all other loyalties and which are lived as foundational to identity, relation, meaning, worth and truth".⁷⁵ In relation to child abuse for example, there is no transcendent locus of commitment or frame of reference for evaluation. The child is enclosed in a comprehensive framework of meaning, truth, value, and action offered by and through the abusive

⁷³ *BTS*, p221.

⁷⁴ He does this, in large part, by further consideration of Augustine, pride, and sloth, although these are not mentioned in my summary.

⁷⁵ *BTS*, p229.

relationship. Consequently, the abusive dynamics raise themselves to being of primary significance as foundational to personal integrity, identity, and life-intentionality, as well as incorporating themselves into the internal structures of identity and communication.

A similar dynamic is evident in the account of the holocaust. The material and social practices of the Nazi state shaped life-intentionality and orientation to the extent that these dynamics secured the practical commitment of others without obviously intruding into their consciously held beliefs. Nazism became the horizon for all commitments, action and intentionality, to which most of public and often private life was directed. Through institutions and the processes of public life the Party used various means to secure commitment and devotion. Additionally, Nazi policy was presented as a quest for a just, right and true order, and the 'emergency' situation that emerged became a self-legitimizing criterion in public policy and practice, eliminating competing claims of any transcendent frame of reference.

The key point in both pathologies is the cumulative blocking of transcendence. Life-intentionalities are enclosed in, energised by, and orientated to the pathological dynamic. In short, both of the concrete pathologies correspond to the dynamics of worship.

2. *True or false worship?* As already seen, genuine worship is characterised by joy, and therefore, to ask whether the concrete pathologies constitute genuine or idolatrous worship is also to ask whether they nourish or block joy. The blocking or disorienting of the dynamics of joy is the fundamental characteristic of idolatry.

Joy which participates in and mediates the dynamics of God perfects and develops the dynamic order of persons-in-communion. There is an intensification of

personal particularity in the dynamic ecology of joyful relation. In the case of child abuse, the intentionality of abuse reduces the child to a particular, perverse functionality for the abuser. The child is not intended as having integrity in life-intentionality and identity apart from the abusive relationship. The abuser does not intend the child to have genuine joy. Abuse is abuse of the child's own capacity for, and orientation to joy. It is abuse of the child's capacity to worship, that is, orient her energies towards the fullness of others, herself, and God.

Abusive relationships are not personal. The abuser does not seek to engage or be engaged by, intensify and develop the dynamic order of his, or the child's own particularity. But at the same time, there is a sense in which abuse over-particularises in its over-determination of life-intentionality and identity. Identity is bound to one particular relation and dynamic which energises, orients, directs and defines identity and life-intentionality into the future. Consequently, access to transcendent sources of meaning, energy and truth are effectively blocked, and additionally, the possibilities of self-transformation. There can be no real freedom or openness in relations with others as other, nor can there be openness towards oneself as potentially other than what one is and has become through abuse. This is, put simply, joylessness. What is blocked is the dynamics of the triune God and the possibilities of non-distorted worship – idolatry.

By way of contrast Nazi ideology appealed in many ways explicitly to joy – in blood, race, nation, soil, culture, etc.. In the ecology of God's movement to creation, there is a proper place for joy in these particularities. The question is about the mode of orientation to them, that is, whether they replace the dynamics of the triune God.

In Nazi Germany, the objects of joy were absolutised and became the prime determinants of the value and truth of everything else whilst making claims to

objectivity. The primacy of loyalty owed by Germans to their race reflected the belief that their race was actually superior to other races. This, in other words, is idolatry – joy in blood, race, nation, and soil is removed from the joy in these particulars as directed by the dynamics of joyful orientation to God. The dynamics of God are orientated towards all of humanity and creation, and although this does not undermine local horizons of commitment, it does make them penultimate to loyalty to God. Thus, all the particularities of concrete situatedness are relativised. Joy in these particularities which participates in and mediates the dynamics of God is orientated towards perfecting and developing the dynamic order of all human particularities in relation to one another. There is a transcendent horizon of loyalty which defines committed responsibility at these levels.

There are a number of other ways in which this dynamic is evident in the holocaust some of which I list for brevity's sake: 1) Nazi ideology and policy reduced and denied Jewish particularity and integrity as a locus of joy; 2) The energies of genuine joy in being German and joy in other races (and in God) are dissipated precisely through their separation, and the genuine richness of German identity undermined along with the possibilities of true worship; 3) At the personal level, Nazi policy depersonalised and departicularised identity through relativising the particular to the group, bureaucratic administration and mass extermination; 4) Death camps were deliberately designed to constrict and constrain by reducing people to the needs of their own physiological survival.

Although this list is by no means exhaustive, it is clear that for both Jews and Germans, the holocaust entailed a highly energised distortion away from the abundance of God. The holocaust can be seen as an abuse of the capacity for joyful praise of God and joyful orientation of self and others.

Idolatry, therefore, holds descriptive and explanatory power in relation to the sexual abuse of children and the holocaust. The dynamics evident in the concrete pathologies can be re-expressed in terms of idolatry. This does more than simply give the same description offered by secular discourse in different terms. The meaning given to idolatry is not containable within the frames of reference offered by secular discourse, and so, using the language of idolatry gives a specifically theological meaning to the pathologies. Within the context of the book, sin can be seen to offer greater descriptive and explanatory power of the concrete pathologies as it better encapsulates the dynamics of the situations and the way in which the will, and the whole person, is incorporated into the situation.

7. *Secular Discourse in McFadyen's Doctrine of Sin*

In this section I will review the method in McFadyen's argument, identify briefly the main developments in his method from his earlier work, consider the role of secular discourse in his doctrine of sin, focus more directly and critically on his method, and finally, consider some possible weaknesses in McFadyen's content.

7.1 *A Basic Outline of Method in Bound to Sin*

Because of the detail that it has been necessary to enter into with regard to the content, I will briefly recap the key methodological stages in *Bound to Sin*.

The doctrine of sin can function as a test of our ability to speak of God in relation to the world. Therefore, McFadyen argues, the doctrine of sin holds

explanatory and descriptive power in relation to concrete pathologies. His aim is to put this to the test by engaging in an explicit conversation with secular discourse.

McFadyen began by offering a secular reading of two concrete pathologies without any explicit reference to theological discourse. These readings then functioned as test cases for a theological account of the pathologies. The intention was not so much to pit them against each other as mutually exclusive frames of reference, but by engaging them in conversation, i.e., a theological account informed by the secular reading, show that theological discourse can offer a more adequate explanation and description of the concrete pathologies than secular discourse can.

McFadyen identified the bound will as the context for testing. Using an alliance between feminist theology and Augustine, McFadyen showed that a secular framework with its assumption of a modern notion of freedom as choice and a neutral will making atomistic decisions, was simply inadequate for describing and explaining the complexities of the pathological dynamics. A theological account of sin can make two significant contributions. First, it holds greater descriptive and explanatory power of the pathologies because theological discourse can offer a dynamic account of sin that shows how the whole person, both willingly and unwillingly, becomes incorporated into the pathological dynamic. Second, it can offer a normative standard of reference for judging the pathologies which derives from explicit reference to God. This shows both why the pathologies actually are pathological, and at the same time, offers a framework of hope for the survivors that may enable and empower them to come to terms with their experiences.

7.ii Earlier and Later Methodology

Three main concerns were identified in McFadyen's earlier work as significant for his method. First, McFadyen understood the task of theology as engaging with both 'the tradition', and 'culture'. This was to be guided by two Rules: the primacy of God in theological method and critical engagement with the determinate situation. Second, his work was both rooted in and intended to shape praxis. Third, his work was structured such that theological discourse enters into a dialectical dialogue with secular discourse. All three of these concerns meant that McFadyen necessarily had to engage with secular discourse.

All three of these concerns are clearly evident in McFadyen's later work in a more pronounced way. The second concern comes through more clearly in his later work, especially in his work with child abuse.⁷⁶ The first and third concerns come to definitive expression in his method of 'testing'. He does far more than enter into a dialectical dialogue with theological and secular discourse, but places them into a situation where the methodological assumptions of both are at stake. Both forms of discourse can still learn from and be criticised by the other, but if theology cannot contribute any further descriptive or explanatory power to the analyses of the concrete pathologies offered by secular discourse, the very purpose of theology is called into question. In short, if theology cannot make a contribution to the understanding of pathologies that cannot be made with secular discourse, reference to God does not make any difference to the affairs of the world.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ McFadyen, Hanks, and Adams, 'Ritual Abuse'; McFadyen, and Ford, 'Praise'; McFadyen, 'Crime and Violence'; McFadyen, 'The Abuse of the Family'; McFadyen, 'Healing the Damaged'; McFadyen, 'Christians in Public Life'.

⁷⁷ See Alistair I. McFadyen, 'Truth as Mission: The Christian Claim to Universal Truth in a Pluralist Public World', in *SJT*, 46, 1993, pp437-456.

As stated above, a crucial difference can be seen in a shift from a concern to maintain the distinctness of theological and secular discourse, and for each to inform and be criticised by the other, to the distinctness of each discourse being maintained by informing and criticising the other. This comes to expression in the sixth methodological thesis: *in order to be intelligible and true to itself*, theology must necessarily engage in dialogue with secular forms of public explanation, understanding and truth which both confront and permeate the situation of a living theological tradition. In short, engagement with secular discourse is a necessary condition for theology to be 'true to itself'. The uniqueness and distinctness of theology is maintained precisely in, through, and by, conversing with secular discourse.

Another important development can be seen in McFadyen's use of secular discourse. Recall that in Chapter 2 above, McFadyen was criticised for not taking sufficient account of the breadth of secular discourse. In essence, McFadyen's account of secular discourse rested upon a monological reading that was almost entirely dependent upon Rom Harré. In his later work, McFadyen does take into consideration a far broader range of thinkers although it remains notable that his secular evaluation of the holocaust was highly dependent upon Zygmunt Bauman. Whilst it is always possible for an author to engage with a greater range of material, some of which will be mentioned shortly, one does not get the sense that McFadyen was somehow trying to fit 'secular discourse' into a theological framework which was a danger in his earlier work.⁷⁸ In short, in his later work, McFadyen seems to have taken secular discourse more seriously on its own terms.

⁷⁸ Again this is why I place him between Types 3 and 4 in Chapter 1 above, and not in Type 4 which would characterise Barth's approach.

However, McFadyen still does not offer an adequate account of 'secular discourse'. In fact, a strong case can be made that McFadyen is putting forward a 'straw-man' argument. McFadyen's description of secular accounts of the will which are enmeshed in a secular account of 'freedom' is simply inadequate for two main reasons. First, McFadyen is taking 'secular' accounts of the will to be synonymous with libertarian freedom. In fact, the core of his critique of secular accounts is that he argues the will cannot occupy a 'neutral' position from which to survey a range of 'free' ('uncaused') choices. Whilst there are undoubtedly a number of philosophers who do fall into this position – especially amongst philosophers of religion – this is by no means always the case, and even when it is, McFadyen's critique does not always apply. For instance, the position which McFadyen attacks demands a heavy dose of libertarian free will combined with a hard-line incompatibilism, such as that which undergirds Alvin Plantinga's 'Free Will Defence'.⁷⁹ In this strong form of libertarian freedom and incompatibilism, McFadyen's critique may hold some force. However, even amongst philosophers who hold a similar position, there are options which evade the full force of McFadyen's critique. One such position is that offered by Peter van Inwagen who maintains incompatibilism with a form of libertarianism which allows for causal factors – 'contra-causal libertarianism'.⁸⁰ McFadyen's critique is evaded further still by compatibilists (such as J. L. Mackie) and of course hard-line determinists. This latter category of thinkers are well represented amongst both social and natural scientists as well as philosophers. Similarly, the accounts of the will found in the work of Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Foucault and others do not fit neatly into McFadyen's 'either/or' description. To put the first point bluntly, McFadyen's critique of secular accounts of the will is a straw-man argument because

⁷⁹ Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974.

⁸⁰ Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

a significant number of thinkers from a variety of disciplines do not adhere to the position McFadyen puts forward as a 'secular' account of the will.

Second, even though McFadyen may have captured a popular understanding of the will such as that frequently offered in the mass media (for example in the so-called 'nature/ nurture debate'), the account of the will offered by many philosophers and social scientists is in some cases virtually indistinguishable from Christian accounts. This is by no means a recent phenomenon either. The obvious example is Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* in which he offers a highly intricate account of the will and its relation to freedom.⁸¹ The account of the will put forward by Aristotle is so close to that offered by Paul in Romans 6 and 7 that it is not an easy task identifying the differences. In other words, not only does McFadyen fail to recognise the vast range of possible positions on the freedom of the will (most of which do not fall under his critique), McFadyen does not recognise that some 'secular' accounts come very close to 'Christian' accounts which calls into question the dichotomy upon which his critique rests.

Given that one of McFadyen's concerns is to engage in a mutually illuminating dialogue with secular discourse, it would be reasonable to assume that a reliable grasp of secular discourse is a *sine qua non* for the task. If we were to push this point further, it would follow that the ability of his theology to engage with regnant secular assumptions is seriously impaired. However, the point need not be put as strongly as this, nor does this excluded his work for being informative for our purposes. A simple way out of the conundrum would be to limit the term secular discourse with the qualifier 'some forms of...' . Similarly, insofar as McFadyen's engagement with secular discourse is accurate, his argument is a highly significant

⁸¹ Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, esp. Books III and VII.

one for both theology and secular discourse (and remains so even if he has overstated the case). As already mentioned, his characterisation of secular discourse does, I believe, capture some dominant secular assumptions at a popular level albeit not at a more highly theorised level.

One consequence of this point is to emphasise the importance of recognising and engaging with the diversity of secular discourses, and, insofar as possible, to treat them as dialogue partners in their own right. McFadyen's approach seeks to show how theology can engage in a mutually informative dialogue with secular discourse, which even if he has not done it as thoroughly as he might have done, his method does not cease to be instructive. Indeed, it is the argument of this thesis that his fundamental method is essentially the correct way of approaching this kind of dialogue. The only way he could have avoided some generalisations of this sort is to focus on *ad hoc* dialogues between particulars. This, I will suggest below, is perhaps the best way to approach this kind of dialogue, but cannot have the wider appeal or applicability for which McFadyen was aiming. McFadyen's project, even if it could have been done more comprehensively (and it is already fairly exhaustive), is of profound importance for Christian theology. 'Straw-man' arguments notwithstanding, McFadyen does highlight both the significance of theology engaging with secular discourse and the importance of recognising the multifaceted nature of secular discourse.

Related to this, we still lack a sufficient account of the complexity of secular discourse(s), and perhaps more importantly, a suggestion of criteria for evaluating, distinguishing and attributing weight to different forms of secular discourse(s) – not all secular discourses function according to the same assumptions. Furthermore, as stated in Chapter 1, not all secular discourses are amenable to a conversation with

theology – the methodological assumptions of some are formed in explicit antagonism to theology. This said, some distinct benefits are evident from a dialogue between theological and secular discourse, some of which we will now consider.

7.iii Secular Discourse in McFadyen's Doctrine of Sin

The central concern of McFadyen's book, even before his thesis that the doctrine of sin can function as a test of our ability to speak of God in relation to the world, is a conversation between theological and secular discourse. In fact, the process of 'testing' relies in large part upon this conversation. As stated in the previous chapter, a conversation goes both ways, so let us consider briefly some of the benefits gained for both sides by the conversation. In contrast to his earlier work, McFadyen in his later writing is stronger on the contribution that theology can make to secular discourse. Let us start with the opposite movement – secular discourse to theology.

1. *Secular discourse shows and reminds theology of its own inner truth.* If theology cannot bring to adequate expression a theological dimension which secular frameworks are incapable of bringing to expression, it has failed. The uniqueness and distinctness of theology is maintained precisely by conversing with secular discourse. Engagement with secular discourse is a necessary condition for theology to be 'true to itself'. In short, secular discourse can serve to remind theology of its central tasks and that it can and should contribute to public discourse.⁸²

⁸² See McFadyen, 'Truth as Mission'.

2. *Secular discourse has brought the doctrine of sin into engagement with the realities of concrete pathologies which has enriched the understanding of sin.* Engagement with secular discourse has helped bring aspects of the theological task to further light that have hitherto received insufficient attention: an explicit relation of the doctrine of sin to the doctrine of the Trinity as well as to joy, faith and worship, a renewed understanding of original sin, the inadequacies of the tradition's emphasis on pride as the root sin, the drawing out and highlighting the significance of Augustine's understanding of the will, an emphasis on the dynamic, comprehensive, energised and relational dimensions of sin.

The pressure of interpretation is stronger in the other direction – the contribution theology can make to secular discourse. The key benefits can be summarised as follows:

1. *Part of the theological task is to discern and show secular discourse its own inner truth.* If the concrete pathologies operating in the sexual abuse of children and the holocaust cannot be adequately understood except with reference to the denial of and opposition to God, then a secular understanding of the world cannot properly exclude God on its own terms. If secular discourses fail to incorporate adequately into themselves reference to the activity of the triune God this is a failure, not according to theological discourse, but according to secular disciplines' own truth. McFadyen's theological description and explanation of the concrete pathologies poses this challenge to secular discourse.

2. *The doctrines of original sin, the bound will, feminist and Augustine's theologies of sin, offer greater explanatory and descriptive power to the complexities of concrete pathologies than a non-theological framework allows.* A secular (moral)

framework does not account adequately for the complexities of the pathological dynamic, in part, because of some of its core assumptions ('straw-man' arguments notwithstanding). The theological account offered highlights both the inadequacy of this kind of a framework and identifies aspects of the pathological dynamics that can only be expressed in a theological framework.

3. *Both feminist and Augustinian doctrines of sin articulate a normative standard of reference as a fuller and richer conception of the potentialities of human life* which Augustine locates in a specifically theological context. McFadyen identifies two significant problems with the analyses of secular discourses: 1) secular discourses fail to convey the full depths and significance of the denial and distortion of human flourishing because they lack a rich conception of normative standards; 2) because of an inadequate understanding of human flourishing, they give those caught up in the pathological dynamics a restricted sense of what they might hope for. Taking joy, faith and worship to be normative standards of reference reveals both the depths of the pathologies (by construing them as idolatry), and indicates the possibilities for a new future.

The danger of setting out the strengths of the conversation in this fashion is that it implies that theological and secular discourses are in conflict. What the whole of McFadyen's work testifies to is that both are dependent upon the other. His later work particularly shows that both theological and secular discourses need the other in order to be true to themselves according to their own criteria. Additionally, the theological approach McFadyen offers is highly indebted to, indeed dependent upon, the analyses offered by secular discourse. Although he argues that the doctrine of sin, and consequently an understanding of the world in relation to God, holds greater

descriptive and explanatory power than the secular analyses, the theological analysis builds upon the secular analysis. The point is that theological discourse can capture aspects of the pathologies that are excluded *a priori* by secular discourse because of its refusal to interpret the world with reference to God. This is clear in the fifth methodological thesis: to engage in a conversation in which the theological and secular interpretation of the pathological dynamics are both tested by each other's understanding, and by the empirical realities of the situation.

7.iv Further Consideration of Method

McFadyen's concern for 'testing' is a bold and original move, but it is worth pausing to consider the methodological underpinnings of the 'testing' more fully. One reviewer of *Bound to Sin* comments: "while the picture of sin that emerges from McFadyen's reflections is often compelling, it is unclear whether the process of testing he employs is genuinely open-ended, or whether the framework within which the study is conducted prejudices the issue in favour of the tradition".⁸³ Does McFadyen, in other words, test the tradition against secular and empirical frames of reference, or is the process of testing set up in advance to favour the tradition?

What is clear is that McFadyen has highlighted some of the weaknesses of (some forms of) secular discourses with respect to concrete pathologies on the basis of a theological account. What is less clear is whether this could have occurred without theological interaction. On the basis of the assumptions held by the secular discourses that McFadyen engages with, the complexities of the pathologies cannot be accounted for adequately. However, not all forms of secular discourse share these

⁸³ Ian A. McFarland, 'Review: Bound to Sin', in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2001', p332.

assumptions. The main contributions that the theological account offered were greater explanatory and descriptive power, and normative standards. Both of these could be offered without explicit reference to God as we have seen in McFadyen's account of feminist doctrines of sin. This means it is plausible that other secular discourses could overcome the weaknesses which McFadyen's theological account highlights without reference to a theological account. From the perspective of secular discourses, the significant factor was not that a more adequate account was offered that was theological, but that (some forms of) secular discourse had been criticised. This raises the question of whether McFadyen offered a theological critique of secular discourse rather than entering into genuine 'testing'.

McFadyen is still keen to retain the 'Barthian priority of God' in theological method,⁸⁴ but also recognises the value of a broadly correlationalist tradition (hence he stands between Types 3 and 4 in Chapter 1 above). His emphasis on dialogue/conversation and a flexible understanding of tradition implies that the process of testing should be recast in the light of the empirical and secular analyses of the pathologies whilst maintaining the orthodoxy of 'the tradition'. However, McFadyen's account of Augustine particularly, although perhaps given a slightly different emphasis, is largely unreconstructed and is recognisably a recapitulation of Augustinian orthodoxy to the extent that one reviewer questions whether he is "losing sight of the method alluded to at an earlier stage".⁸⁵ Given that the theological account remains largely unchanged although indebted to secular analyses, it appears that McFadyen has not remained sufficiently true to his intended method/correlation. Emphasising the 'priority of God' at the expense of a correlation is also evident in a

⁸⁴ On occasions, McFadyen does offer a critique of other people's work which gives too much to secular discourse at the expense of theology, e.g. Alistair I. McFadyen, 'Review: *Sin, Guilt, and Forgiveness: The Hidden Dimensions of a Pastoral Process*, Mary A. Coate, London: SPCK, 1994', in *Expository Times*, 106, 1995, p349.

⁸⁵ Graham, Review, p259.

more recent work on forgiveness when McFadyen writes: “‘Natural reason’, ‘common sense’ and the truth claims of secular disciplines or culture may be made use of, but only in an *ad hoc* fashion, to help extrapolate the account of forgiveness to be found within the distinctive integrity of the Christian faith”.⁸⁶ In short, McFadyen appears to have mounted a theological critique of (some forms of) secular discourse rather than a genuine ‘testing’ of the doctrine of sin.

7.v Further Consideration of Content

The focus of this chapter is on McFadyen’s method not content, but there are some issues which are worth raising briefly which have a bearing on method. McFadyen brings together discussion of the sexual abuse of children and the holocaust. These two pathologies were used as fields of testing for the doctrine of sin. One of the main developments that came from this testing was taking joy, faith and worship as normative standards of the good from which these pathologies should be judged. Given this, some lines of thought are conspicuously absent. In the light of these pathologies, there is no attempt to touch on questions of theodicy. Similarly absent, and this is especially surprising given McFadyen’s concern for praxis, he made little effort to show what the western theological tradition might have to say to the extremities of the human condition. And perhaps most importantly, in a theological account of sin and normative standards, the significance and possibilities of the cross, resurrection, forgiveness, redemption and reconciliation are rarely touched upon. It might be asking too much of an author to incorporate this into an already broad ranging, and at the same time highly specific (in its aims) book, but

⁸⁶ McFadyen, and Sarot, *Forgiveness and Truth*, pp2-3.

given McFadyen's concerns, it is surprising not to find further discussion of these issues in other places.⁸⁷

It is not insignificant that the only other theological book that brings together the sexual abuse of children and the holocaust is not even mentioned in *Bound to Sin*. This book is David Blumenthal's *Facing the Abusing God*.⁸⁸ What is more significant is that this book is a theology of protest – and a protest which is particularly difficult reading for a Christian theologian. Blumenthal, a Jew, poses in an especially acute manner the problem of speaking of a God who in the light of cries of pain does not appear to respond to human suffering. In addition to the strong voices of protest against 'the abusing God', what comes through especially clearly in Blumenthal's work is dissonance – to the extent that it is built into the very structure of the book. Blumenthal writes:

in the aftermath of the holocaust, one cannot simply speak; that discourse has been shattered by the irruption of the holocaust into modern consciousness; that language has been ruptured by the in-breaking of the holocaust into common speech. ... Caesura, brokenness, fragmentation are all we have to express the disjuncture of normal discourse with the reality of the holocaust. ... Thought itself must be broken, shattered, fragmented – like a nightmare; for writing theology after the holocaust is living in a nightmare with its sudden turns, its flashbacks. To do theology is to remember, in pieces, in horrible pieces. ...

Caesura. Fragmentedness. Irruption.⁸⁹

Blumenthal adds a disruptive, 'nightmare-flashback' to the end of each chapter in the first part of the book. These 'irruptions' certainly shock the reader out of any settled, systematic mode of thinking (which is followed through in the later exegesis). Even if, joining with another reviewer of McFadyen's work, "I was disappointed at McFadyen's lack of engagement with such themes as the

⁸⁷ To some extent, some of these issues are addressed in McFadyen, 'Healing the Damaged'; Ford, and McFadyen, 'Praise'.

⁸⁸ David R. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993. It is important to note that when McFadyen was approached for material he found especially useful for *Bound to Sin*, one of the first books that he mentioned (and spoke highly of) was Blumenthal's. Additionally, given McFadyen's specific concern for 'testing', it is difficult to incorporate Blumenthal's work into the analysis. This is also a point mentioned in Graham, 'Review', p260; and one of very few good (or accurate) points made in Hannah Holtschneider, 'Review: Bound to Sin', found at <http://www.cjcr.cam.ac.uk/resources/reviews/reviews/01004.html> [February, 2002].

⁸⁹ Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, pp8-9.

impossibility of speaking of God after Auschwitz, or the considerable pastoral *and theological* issues generated by survivors of abuse searching for images of God that heal, rather than sanction, their betrayals”,⁹⁰ the main weakness seems to be that he ends his book with an account of the good, rooted in the goodness of God, without having addressed the dissonance, the theology of protest, that is evident in Blumenthal’s work. The problem is not with the validity of his argumentation – that every pathology carries with it an implicit characterisation of the good – but that McFadyen does not seem to have taken the horror implicit in his own content into account for the later stages of the book. Put in more general terms, content impacts method not only in terms of the arrangement of material, but in terms of what the material becomes. Perhaps more than any other area of theology the doctrine of sin should affect the way that theology is done. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5 on Barth’s hamartiology.

8. Conclusion

The central aim of this chapter was to highlight some significant developments in the form and content of Alistair McFadyen’s later theology. In regard to form, the main difference is that the distinctness of theological and secular discourse is maintained *by* informing and criticising the other. This is perhaps clearest in the sixth methodological thesis: in order to be intelligible and true to itself, theology must necessarily engage in dialogue with secular forms of public explanation, understanding and truth which both confront and permeate the situation of a living theological tradition. McFadyen has tried to extend the conversation between theological and secular discourses into a form of concrete testing. The adequacies of

⁹⁰ Graham, ‘Review’, p260. (*Italics in original*).

both secular and theological accounts of concrete pathologies were put to the test and placed into concrete conversation. There is, however, more theological mileage to be gained from engaging with an empirical frame of reference and it was also suggested that McFadyen offered a theological critique of secular discourse rather than a form of concrete 'testing'.

In regard to content, there is a clear shift from theological anthropology to the doctrine of sin (although the continuities between the two are evident). McFadyen demonstrated the possibility of theology having something to contribute to both secular discourse and also concrete pathologies. By highlighting the role of the (bound) will in relation to pathological situations, McFadyen has offered a more adequate account of the complexities of the situation than many secular theorists are able to do. Overall, McFadyen offered a comprehensive doctrine of sin in such a way that the relevance to concrete situations was evident. Some question was raised about the conspicuous absence of discussions of dissonance, theodicy and some pastoral issues. Neither was it clear the extent to which the doctrine of sin (content) affected theological method.

The following two chapters considers aspects of Karl Barth's thought which will be used to shed further light on the interaction between theological and secular discourse. Chapter 6 will then bring McFadyen's thought into explicit dialogue with Barth's.

CHAPTER 4

Method in Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology

1. *Introduction*

The previous two chapters of the thesis explored the methodological dynamics of Alistair McFadyen's thought which can be located somewhere between the Types 3 and 4 explored in Chapter 1 above. The aim of this chapter and Chapter 5 is to explore further Type 4 (Karl Barth) with respect to theological anthropology and the doctrine of sin.

In Chapter 1 it was suggested that it is a necessary aspect of the two-fold task of theology to maintain both the priority of God in theological method and engage with the determinate situation. It was also suggested that the most appropriate way of doing this, following McFadyen, is to approach theology from between Type 3 and 4. Because of the difficulty of staying on the tight-rope between Types 3 and 4, it was argued that if we are to fall off, it is important to veer towards Type 4 rather than Type 3 as this does better justice to the uniqueness of the Christian message which should have ultimate priority. In this respect, a dialogue with Type 4 functions as a useful check for the tight-rope walk as well as helping to give ultimate priority to the trinitarian self-revelation of God. Therefore, the focus of this chapter and the subsequent chapter is with Karl Barth's thought (Type 4), rather than a Type 3 thinker (such as Paul Tillich) whose thought might also have a significant contribution to make to the relation between theological and secular discourse. Additionally, most

approaches to these sorts of areas of dogmatics (such as the 'theology of culture') tend to have been through Type 3 rather than Type 4 approaches.¹

The central concern of this chapter is to identify the method operative in Karl Barth's theological anthropology which is dealt with most comprehensively in *Church Dogmatics III/2*. Because of the nature of Barth's theology, it does not serve our task to ask directly about the interaction between theological and secular discourse, but by focusing first on his method. Only in doing this will the question of the relationship between theological and secular discourse be highlighted. This question is peripheral to Barth's concerns (and may not be the most appropriate distinction for approaching his thought), which is not to say that his thought is not informative, rather that it can only be addressed in the light of broader methodological considerations.

The structure of this chapter can be set out as follows. Initially, some key aspects of Barth's 'theo-logic' will be set out. It is helpful to identify some key loci which are evident in his theology more generally which are also operative in his theological anthropology. Attention will then be turned specifically to Barth's anthropology as it appears in *Church Dogmatics III/2*. Because of the inseparability of form and content in Barth's thought, Barth's method will only become clear by considering the content, and so both form and content will be developed in conjunction. However, the important methodological considerations will be identified. Following the exposition of Barth's content, the interaction between theological and secular discourse will be addressed more explicitly and critically.

¹ This is particularly evident in 'theology and film' (Chapter 7 below), examples of which include Clive Marsh, and Gaye Ortiz (eds.), *Explorations in Theology and Film: Movies and Meaning*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997, esp. Part 1; and to a lesser extent Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000.

2. Method in Karl Barth

To attempt to offer even an outline of Barth's methodology in the space of a few pages would be absurd and this has been done at greater length elsewhere.² However, it is helpful to have some idea of what to look for in advance for the task of identifying Barth's method in his anthropology (even if this is in explicit contrast to Barth's method³). Consequently, three key loci or emphases will be mentioned. It is to be stressed that these loci are by no means exhaustive, nor is this treatment of Barth's method intended to be remotely comprehensive.⁴ The purpose is solely to highlight three significant aspects of Barth's method to aid the analysis of his anthropology below.

² For instance: Stephen W. Sykes (ed.), *Karl Barth: Studies of his Theological Method*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979; Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation with Special Reference to Volume One of Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, esp. Parts 1 and 2; David F. Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics*, New York: Peter Lang, 1985; Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to his Early Theology, 1910-1931*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1962; Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; Robert G. Crawford, 'The Theological Method of Karl Barth', in *SJT*, 25, 1972, pp320-336; Gordon Watson, 'A Study in St Anselm's Soteriology and Karl Barth's Theological Method', in *SJT*, 42/4, 1984, pp493-512; George S. Hendry, 'The Transcendental Method in the Theology of Karl Barth', in *SJT*, 37/2, 1984, pp213-227.

³ However, analysis of Barth's method is on the basis of having first read Barth, and is therefore *a posteriori*. It is also worth noting that Barth himself does this in the opening pages of his dogmatics proper. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995, pp25f.

⁴ Many highly significant aspects of Barth's method (and content) are not being mentioned here. Other important considerations include Barth's use of scripture (David F. Ford, 'Barth's Interpretation of the Bible', in Sykes, *Karl Barth*, pp55-87; Ford, *Barth and God's Story*); the Holy Spirit (John Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1991; Philip J. Rosato, S. J., *The Spirit as Lord: The Pneumatology of Karl Barth*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981); the role of grace (Gerit C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, London: Paternoster, 1956); Barth's biography (Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1976, McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, Torrance, *Karl Barth*); and time (Richard H. Roberts, 'Barth's Doctrine of Time: Its Nature and Implications', in Sykes, *Karl Barth*, pp88-146). In fact, there are very few aspects of Barth's content that cannot be seen to have significant methodological implications.

1. The task of theology for Barth is a derivative one. That is, theology takes the form of a *Nachdenken*.⁵ In his *Göttingen Dogmatics* Barth writes: "All reflection on how God *can* reveal himself is in truth only a 'thinking after' of the fact that God *has* revealed himself."⁶ What this means for Christian theology is that every aspect of method, content, and doctrine is to be determined *a posteriori* to the revelation event.⁷ The significance of this is twofold. First, the object of theology (God, as subject, who becomes 'object-for-us') determines both the form and content of theology (hence the inseparability of form and content in Barth⁸). The method and the results of the enquiry are determined by the object⁹, and so the 'pressure of interpretation' is irreducibly from God to us. This approach contributes to Barth's understanding of theology as a science.¹⁰

Second, corresponding to the order of knowing is a shift in the approach to theology. Much theology has proceeded by means of asking 'how' questions, which tend to assume a prior soteriology, anthropology, and epistemology – 'How do we

⁵ *Nachdenken* also has connotations of 'under-standing', that is, literally standing under the authority of the object of enquiry.

⁶ Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion, Volume I*, (ed.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, p151; cited in Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, p74.

⁷ See esp. Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, pp15f., 25-28, 49-53, 71-74, 89f; also Stephen W. Sykes, 'Barth on the Centre of Theology', in Sykes, *Karl Barth*, pp29f.; Ford, 'Barth's Interpretation of the Bible', pp55-87; R. D. Williams, 'Barth on the Triune God', in Sykes, *Karl Barth*, pp148f.; Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, p2; Daniel J. Price, *Karl Barth's Anthropology in Light of Modern Thought*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002, pp18-20, 49-50, 102f.; Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth. A Paraphrase*: (trans.) John Webster, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001, esp. pp9f.. There is, however, some question about whether Barth consistently avoids adopting an *a priori* approach. See esp. Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, pp116-119, and Williams, 'Barth on the Triune God'.

⁸ Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, pp15-22; Gary W. Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations: Trinitarian, Christological, and Human: Towards an Ethic of the Family*, New York: Peter Lang, 1999, p44n.

⁹ See Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum – Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of his Theological Scheme*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1960, Chapter 1. Barth writes: "'rational' knowledge of the object of faith is derived from the object of faith and not vice versa. That means to say that the object of faith and its knowledge are ultimately derived from the Truth, that is, from God and from his will." (p52). Also, Karl Barth, 'On Systematic Theology', in *SJT*, 14, 1961, pp225-228.

¹⁰ Barth, *CD II/1*, pp311f., Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/1: The Doctrine of God*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000, Chapter V; and esp. Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

know God?'; 'Does God exist?'; 'What is God?'; and so on. In contrast to these approaches, Barth's primary concern is with 'who' questions – 'Who is Yahweh?'; 'Who is Jesus Christ?'.¹¹ In developing and clarifying Barth's thought, this is the point which Dietrich Bonhoeffer had in mind when he opened his 1933 lectures in Christology by stating that: "Teaching about Christ begins in silence",¹² and went on to argue emphatically for the methodological priority of the 'who' question. The silence to which Bonhoeffer was referring is a methodological or presuppositional silence which allows the Counter-Logos to determine the nature of human *logoi*. In short, by maintaining the primacy of the 'who' question, Barth's theology takes the form of a *Nachdenken*.¹³

2. Revelation is the revelation of God as the triune God.¹⁴ Who God is is the trinitarian God, and God as Trinity determines the form and content of theology to the extent that Jüngel refers to Barth's placing of the doctrine of the Trinity at the beginning of his dogmatics as "a hermeneutical decision of the greatest relevance".¹⁵ Of particular significance is Barth's opening of his dogmatics proper with the doctrine of the Trinity which stands in radical contrast to much modern theology where the doctrine of the Trinity often appears as an 'add-on' in the final sections of the book.¹⁶ Barth writes:

¹¹ See Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1965, pp117-127; Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, pp11-12, 22n, 49n, 71-74.

¹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, (trans.) Edwin H. Robertson, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978, p27. See also Translator's Preface, esp. p15; Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, pp 22n, 49n, Alan J. Torrance, 'Introductory Essay', in Eberhard Jüngel, *Christ, Justice, and Peace: Towards a Theology of the State in Dialogue with the Barmen Declaration*, D. Bruce Hamill, and Alan J. Torrance (trans.), T & T Clark, 1992, ppxiif.

¹³ Because this revelation is centred on Jesus Christ it excludes all forms of natural theology.

¹⁴ CD I/1, Chapters I and II.

¹⁵ Eberhard Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976, p4.

¹⁶ CD I/1, p300.

God reveals himself. He reveals Himself *through Himself*. He reveals *Himself*. If we really want to understand revelation in terms of its subject, i.e., God, then the first thing we have to realise is that this subject, God, the Revealer, is identical with His act in revelation and also identical with its effect. It is from this fact... that we learn we must begin the doctrine of revelation with the doctrine of the triune God.¹⁷

The Trinity, therefore, holds formal and material primacy in Barth's thought and can be seen to inform every aspect of Barth's content.¹⁸

3. Revelation is centred in and is identical with Jesus Christ. For Barth this means that all aspects of Christian doctrine are to be thought through from the perspective of Jesus Christ.¹⁹ In the opening of his book on Barth's Christology, John Thompson writes:

In his [Barth's] theology there is no Christology as such; on the other hand, it is all Christology. ... [T]here is no such thing as a section on Christology in the whole of Karl Barth's writings. Yet it is Christological through and through. This is due to the fact that Barth's theology as a whole and in every part is determined by its relation to Jesus Christ, his being and action, so that one cannot detach any aspect from it. ... Because Jesus Christ has this priority, centrality and normative position for faith and theology, all theology has this Christological basis and perspective.²⁰

The methodological significance of this is that for Barth theology has its starting point in Christology. Consequently, to cite Thompson again, "all aspects of theology and dogmatics must be dynamically related to this living and concrete centre and be determined throughout by it".²¹ Barth's theology is therefore thoroughly Christocentric.²² McCormack explains that Christocentrism for Barth, "refers to the attempt to understand every doctrine from a centre in God's Self-revelation in Jesus

¹⁷ CD I/1, p296. (Italics in original).

¹⁸ The methodological implications of God as Trinity in Barth's thought are considered in: Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*; Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, esp. Parts 1 and 2; Williams, 'Barth on the Triune God'; Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*; Colin E. Gunton, *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, Part II.

¹⁹ See Sykes, 'Barth on the Centre of Theology'.

²⁰ John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1978, pp1-2.

²¹ Thompson, *Christ in Perspective*, p2.

²² But not Christomonism. Eberhard Jüngel rightly states: "Christology is the carefully considered foundation of anthropology in Barth's characteristically Christological thought. There can be no question of a 'Christomonism', precisely because this Christological concentration is not a principle from which a system can be deduced." (*Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy*, Paul G. E. (trans.); Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986, p128).

Christ".²³ This is absolutely key for Barth. Every doctrine, including anthropology as we shall see shortly, is to be approached by adopting Christology as the starting point.²⁴

In sum, Barth's theological method takes the form of *Nachdenken*, and is grounded in an understanding of God as Trinity. The pressure of interpretation is irreducible from God to humanity, and so the starting point for all theological enquiry is Christology. This is evident time and time again throughout the *Dogmatics*:

The place from which the way of dogmatic knowledge is to be seen and understood can be neither a prior anthropological possibility nor a subsequent ecclesiastical reality, but only the present moment of the speaking and hearing of Jesus Christ Himself.²⁵

The very possibility of addressing theological anthropology is itself determined by Christology: "Man is made an object of theological knowledge by the fact that his relationship to God is revealed to us in the Word of God".²⁶ With these methodological emphases in mind, we now consider Barth's method specifically in his theological anthropology.

²³ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p454.

²⁴ This was not always the case for Barth. McCormack rightly recognises that Christology only functions as a 'methodological rule' for all doctrines in his mature thought, that is, from approximately Volume II onwards. In his work up to this point, Christology is the theoretical ground of Barth's theology, but Barth's "basic orientation (his existential focus, if you will) was towards the revelation-event which occurs in the *here and now* on the basis of God's Self-revelation in Jesus Christ" (*Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p328). What this means is that in his earlier work, Barth did not attempt to understand all doctrine from the starting point of Christology, and that although the ground of his theology was Christological, his theology was pneumatocentric.

²⁵ CD I/1, p41. Or again: "A church dogmatics must, of course, be Christologically determined as a whole and in all its parts, as surely as the revealed Word of God, attested by Holy Scripture and proclaimed by the Church, is its one and only criterion, and as surely as this revealed Word is identical with Jesus Christ. If dogmatics cannot regard itself and cause itself to be regarded as fundamentally Christology, it has assuredly succumbed to some alien sway and is already on the verge of losing its character as church dogmatics." (CD I/2, p123).

²⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/2: The Doctrine of Creation*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998, p19.

3. Barth's Anthropology in Church Dogmatics III/2

To be rightly understood, Barth's anthropology needs to be located within the whole, and this is to be done in two ways. First, Barth's theological anthropology needs to be positioned in terms of what Gary Deddo calls Barth's 'theology of relations'.²⁷ Deddo identifies 'seven spheres of being-in-relation' in Barth's thought: 1) Intra-Trinitarian Life: Son to Father in the Spirit; 2) Jesus to the Father in the Spirit; 3) Humankind to God through Jesus; 4) Jesus to other humans; 5) Humankind: One to Another; 6) Body to Soul; 7) Eternity to Time.²⁸ Many of these 'spheres' fall beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless it is important to note that there is an *analogia relationis* at the heart of Barth's thought.²⁹ The trinitarian relations provide an ontological and ethical grounding for understanding our relationship to God and to each other. There is, in other words, a correspondence between human relations, and God's relation to us in Jesus Christ and the Triune relations. The correspondence functions in an irreversible direction, viz., God to humanity. Thus, Barth roots his special ethics in his anthropology, and so Volume III/4 (Chapter XII) parallels Volume III/2 (Chapter X) in terms of its structure.³⁰ So too, Barth's anthropology is grounded in Christology and ultimately his doctrine of God. Although it is in Volume III/2 that Barth expounds his theology of relations in the most detail, the groundwork is laid as early as Volume I/1 on the Word of God and the Trinity, and Volume II/1 in the action of God (being and act are irreducibly connected in Barth). The point is this. Ontologically, Barth's theology of relations

²⁷ Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, *passim*.

²⁸ Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, p41.

²⁹ Barth does not use this term until he considers the Christological grounding for anthropology in CD III/2. This is because the analogy only makes sense once the second term of comparison has been introduced, viz., humanity.

³⁰ Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, p5.

starts with the intra-trinitarian relations, moves to God's covenant relation to creation, and then to human relations. This framework provides the foundation for his special ethics. We are therefore jumping into the middle of his ontological framework.

Second, Barth locates his anthropology in the second volume of his doctrine of creation. The first volume deals with the act of creation and the relation to covenant, and so the second focuses on the creature. In accordance with Barth's method, Christology is the starting point for Barth's theology of relations. Barth opens III/2 by making this clear:

Because man... is the creature whose relation to God is revealed to us in the Word of God, he is the central object of the theological doctrine of creation. *As the man Jesus is Himself the revealing Word of God, He is the source of our knowledge of the nature of man as created by God.*³¹

Barth structures the volume accordingly. There are four main sections in the volume corresponding to humanity's relation to God, humanity's relation to others, humanity as soul and body, and humanity's relation to time. Each of the four sections opens with a subsection starting with Jesus: 'Jesus, Man for God'; 'Jesus, Man for Other Men'; 'Jesus, Whole Man'; and 'Jesus, Lord of Time'. Both in terms of form and content, Barth's starting point is Christology.

At this point it is worth making a point of clarification about three phrases that Barth uses: 'real man'; 'humanity'; and 'whole man'. 'Real man' refers to the God-man relationship which Barth expounds in §44, 'humanity' refers to the man-man relationship in §45, and 'whole man' to the unity of soul and body in the individual person in §46.³² We will focus on the first two areas of his anthropology: humanity's relation to God (real man), and then to others (humanity). In many ways, these two

³¹ CD III/2, p3. (My italics).

³² Stuart McLean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981, p25; Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, p88.

areas form the heart of Barth's anthropology, and furthermore, clearly reveal Barth's method and how he envisages the relation between theological and secular discourses.

3.i (Real) Man as the Creature of God

§44 is comprised of three subsections: 'Jesus, Man for God'; 'Phenomena of the Human'; and 'Real Man'. In the first section, Barth develops six criteria from the history of Jesus which are further developed in the second and third subsections. In other words, this section is concerned with ascertaining the nature of 'real man' derived from a Christological basis. We will therefore begin by looking at the Christological basis for Barth's criteria and then examine how he applies them in his third subsection. The phenomena of the human, in which Barth's engagement with secular discourse is stated most clearly, will be picked up at a later stage.

Barth begins by locating the humanity of Jesus in the continuity of his history.³³ In his history, Jesus appears as the bearer of an office acting in a specific and concrete direction. In locating Jesus in his work and the office he holds, Jesus is real man. Jesus is real man and has a real history. The real man is the working Jesus. The exclusiveness of Jesus is not that he has a history, but that he *is* his history. Jesus is his history because Jesus' exclusiveness rests in the fact that the work of Jesus is uniquely his because he *is* this history as Saviour.³⁴ Neither can the person and history of Jesus be separated, nor the work of Jesus and the work of God because God acts as Jesus acts. Jesus acts in the name of God and is therefore doing God's work. Jesus is known only in his work and history, and as such, his being as man is in his

³³ CD III/2, pp56f.

³⁴ CD III/2, p60.

work and in this work he has a human nature. Jesus does not have a human nature first which functions as a presupposition to explain and validate the nature of Jesus, rather, it is in his being as a man that he reveals and explains human nature. He is a person as we are, not in the sense of sharing in our humanity, but in being the one in whose humanity we must share.

Two important aspects of Barth's method have already become clear. First, the pressure of interpretation is irreducibly from Jesus to human nature.³⁵ This is perhaps the most radical and significant aspect of Barth's anthropology in contrast to most other theological anthropologies. Barth has radically reversed the pressure of interpretation, suggesting that we cannot learn about the nature of true humanity without it being revealed in some sense, nor without reference to God. Both ontically and noetically, Jesus functions as the methodological foundation for ascertaining the nature of true humanity. Put differently, Barth does not operate with a prior concept of what it is to be human, that is, fitting Jesus' humanity into prior (immanent) categories, rather, who and what Jesus is determines what it is to be human. We share in his humanity rather than he in ours.³⁶

Secondly, Barth's Christology provides the ontological foundation for his anthropology. Gary Deddo summarises five points which Barth makes to establish this foundation:³⁷ 1) In the person of Jesus there is the co-incidence of act and being; 2) This Jesus, in the unity of being and act, is a human person; 3) The history, action, and work of the person of Jesus has no other reason for being except the salvation of humankind; 4) The life and work of this man are identical with the life and work of

³⁵ The situation is not quite as straightforward as this. Clearly we, and Barth, do operate with a prior concept of human nature into which Jesus is born. However, the point is that what we mean by human nature is redefined by the life of Jesus, and from this perspective we can see what true human nature is.

³⁶ Again I emphasise that this is not to say that we do not have knowledge of humanity apart from Jesus, rather that our understanding of humanity is redefined by Jesus' humanity, which is true humanity.

³⁷ Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, pp45-51; corresponding to CD III/2, pp55-68.

God, yet in such a way that the real humanity of Jesus is confirmed and not subsumed; 5) The unity and continuing distinction between the man Jesus and God is ultimately grounded in the intra-triune relations of Father, Son, and Spirit. Thus, Barth affirms a correspondence among "a) the intra-trinitarian relations, b) the relation of the man Jesus and God, c) humankind's relationship to God, d) the relationship of the man Jesus with other human beings and e) the personal relations among human beings".³⁸ It is on the basis of this ontology that Barth identifies six criteria which turn up time and time again throughout the volume and it is to these that we now turn.³⁹

These six criteria emerge in the first instance from a summary of the Christology just outlined.⁴⁰ At this point Barth's emphasis is on humankind's relationship to God in the humanity of Jesus. He then considers the implications of this for humanity in general which is where we shall focus.⁴¹ In short, Barth is attempting "to define more precisely the criteria which must be used in any attempt to determine the nature of man".⁴² Again we note that Barth is attempting to determine the nature of humanity according to criteria that are Christologically rooted. In each case the criterion opens by positing a relation between Jesus' humanity and ours. We cite Barth at length:

1. If it is the case in relation to the man Jesus that in His humanity we are confronted immediately and directly with the being of God,

then necessarily, assuming that there is similarity between Him and us in spite of all dissimilarity, *every man is to be understood*, at least mediately and indirectly, to the extent that he is conditioned by the priority of this man, *in his relationship with God*, i.e., in the light of the fact that he comes *from* God, and above all that God moves to him.

2. If it is the case... then... *every man is a being which is conditioned by the fact that this deliverance is for him, that every man as such must exist and have his being in a history*

³⁸ Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, p51.

³⁹ CD III/2, pp68-71, 73-74, 132-133, 162-163, 214-221.

⁴⁰ CD III/2, pp68-71.

⁴¹ These criteria appear in their most succinct form in CD III/2, pp132-133 (without enumeration). See Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, pp52f..

⁴² CD III/2, p73.

which stands in a clear and recognisable relationship to the divine deliverance enacted in the man Jesus.

3. If it is the case... then... *the being of every man, in so far as this history essentially concerns it, is not an end in itself, but has its true determination in the glory of God....*

4. If it is the case... then... *it must be said of every man that it is essential to him that as he exists, God is over him as his Lord, and he himself stands under the lordship of God the Lord.*

5. If it is the case... then... *the being of every man must consist in this history. Not only his actions but his being will consist in his participation in what God does and means for him. ... The proper action of real man can then be understood only in the light of the fact that it may correspond to the divine action in his favour, doing justice to the grace addressed to him.*

6. If... then... *the being of no other man can be understood apart from the fact that his existence too, as an active participation in what God does and means for him, is an event in which he renders God service, in which he for his part is for God, because God first willed to bind Himself to man, and in so doing has bound man to Himself.*⁴³

These criteria can be summarised thus: "man belongs to God, exists only in relation to God's act, exists for the glory of God, under His Lordship, according to his purpose, and in His service".⁴⁴ What is unambiguously clear from these criteria, is that for Barth, 'real man' can only be understood in explicit relation to God. In anticipation of Chapter 6, one difference between Barth's and McFadyen's anthropology is that Barth is not appealing primarily to a doctrine of the Trinity, and on the basis of the intra-trinitarian relations postulating about the nature of humanity. For Barth, humanity is ontically constituted by being-in-relation to God (not by identifying a correspondence between human and intra-trinitarian relations). The methodological implication is that Jesus, as fully human and fully God, is the person from whom the nature of the relationship between God and humanity and what this means for human being is revealed. Although McFadyen does also root his anthropology in Christology, the emphasis that this method receives in Barth is far greater. Whereas in McFadyen, there is a possibility of identifying the key aspects of

⁴³ CD III/2, pp73-74. I am closely following McLean's layout (*Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth*, pp26-27).

⁴⁴ Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, p57.

his anthropology without explicit reference to theology (for instance Rom Harré), this is not a possibility for Barth.

Having identified six operative criteria from Christology Barth quickly adds that these criteria are “the minimal requirements” by which all conceptions of human nature must be measured.⁴⁵ Barth is under no illusion that he has arrived at a theological concept of humanity, rather that these criteria are the measure for all conceptions of humanity whatever their source.⁴⁶ This clearly has important implications for the relation between theological and secular discourse which will be unpacked at length below. At this point we note that theological criteria, both ultimately and operatively, have primacy over non-theological approaches to the self. Barth goes on:

No definition of human nature can meet our present need if it is merely an assertion and description of immediately accessible and knowable characteristics of the nature which man thinks he can regard as that of his fellows and therefore of man in general. *From the standpoint of all our criteria, human self-knowledge on this basis must be regarded as a vicious circle in which we can never attain to real man.*⁴⁷

Again it is clear that ‘real man’ is an explicitly theological concept that cannot be identified in non-theological terms. Barth is not arguing that we cannot say anything about humanity without reference to theology, but that an adequate account of human nature can only be offered with recourse to an explicitly theological

⁴⁵ CD III/2, p73.

⁴⁶ See CD III/2, pp19-54, 75-132.

⁴⁷ CD III/2, p75 (my italics). It is worth noting the similarities to Luther’s characterisation of sin as *incurvatus in se*. See Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: Lectures on Romans*, Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971, esp. pp291f.; 313; 345. The methodological implications of inwardness are explored in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, Part 2; Alan J. Torrance, ‘The Self-Relation, Narcissism and the Gospel of Grace’, *SJT*, 40, 1987, pp481-510; John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity: A Theological and Philosophical Approach*, Chippenham: Xpress Reprints, 1993, Chapter 4; Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949, Chapter 6; and Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, (ed. and trans.) Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, 1985. Barth himself also refers to sin in terms of “man turned in upon himself” (e.g. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/2: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000, p407).

discourse. Descriptions of humankind without reference to God give us “knives without edges, or handles without pots, or predicates without subjects”.⁴⁸

Stuart McLean recognises that these six criteria reveal a “dialectical-dialogical relationship between God and man in Jesus Christ”.⁴⁹ More specifically, points one and four refer to presence and Lordship (revelation), points two and five to deliverance (reconciliation), and three and six to glory (redemption).⁵⁰ Put differently, the first set of pairs refers to the relationship between God and human, the second to the action within the relationship, and the third to fulfilled or completed action. Thus, at the heart of Barth’s anthropology is the premise that God exists and is in relation to human beings. Therefore, any definition of humanity without this dimension would be radically deficient. Again we emphasise that Barth does not deny that the social sciences (secular discourse) can discover anything about humanity, rather, the main criterion for judging all anthropologies is that humanity is irreducibly related to God. In this context we note that one of the main aims of Stuart McLean’s essay is “to introduce social scientists to Karl Barth”.⁵¹ In terms of method, Barth’s anthropology is determined by the object of enquiry (the humanity of Jesus Christ) and the pressure of interpretation is from the locus of theology, the Word/ God-man/ Jesus, to human nature in general. It is humankind’s relationship to God that is essential to an understanding of humankind. In large part, this is due to a key aspect of Barth’s thought – that knowledge of humanity as grounded in Jesus Christ is also the *ontological determination of humanity’s existence*.⁵²

⁴⁸ CD III/2, p76.

⁴⁹ McLean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth*, p27.

⁵⁰ McLean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth*, p27.

⁵¹ McLean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth*, pvi. Cf. Daniel Price’s aim: “I also hope that, in the light of this study, social and psychological scientists might find Barth’s anthropology increasingly interesting, especially at the point where psychologists of a Christian persuasion seek both to integrate and differentiate Christian belief and scientific practice” (*Karl Barth’s Anthropology*, p7).

⁵² ‘Determination’ (*Bestimmung*) is a difficult word in Barth. It can be translated ‘determination’, ‘destination’, ‘destiny’, ‘statement’, or ‘definition’. The word incorporates notions of purpose,

The ontological determination of humanity is grounded in the fact that one man among all others is the man Jesus. So long as we select any other starting point for our study, we shall reach only the phenomena of the human.⁵³

It is with these words that Barth opens the subsection on 'real man' and in the following paragraph gives his most succinct summary of the six criteria. This means that we are now at the point where Barth is to develop a constructive approach to a definition of humanity on the basis of these criteria and the recognition of Jesus as the ontological determination of humanity.

At the heart of Barth's explication of the definition of humankind is that the being of the human is in 'being-with-God'. As we have seen, humankind is both revealed in Jesus and has its ontological determination in Jesus. In other words, the ontological status of humankind is determined in and with the being-in-relationship of the man Jesus to God. Barth's six criteria were initially developed by looking at Jesus' relationship to God and then humanity in general's relationship to God. Thus, to be human is to be essentially in relationship to God. Because Jesus is with God in a unique way, viz., that he is the presence of God himself, all other persons are thereby brought into relationship with God. In short:

The ontological determination of all men is that Jesus is present among them as their divine Other, their Neighbour, Companion, and Brother. ... to be man is to be with God.⁵⁴

Humanity's being with God is the "basic determination" of our being and is the heart of what Barth means by 'real man'.⁵⁵ It is because being-with-God is the

meaning, destiny, definition, and design, and is therefore an 'onto-relational' term. It approximately corresponds with the English 'designation'. See Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, p37n.

⁵³ CD III/2, p132.

⁵⁴ CD III/2, p135.

⁵⁵ This is why "Godlessness is not, therefore, a possibility but an ontological impossibility for man. ... To be in sin, in godlessness, is a mode of being contrary to our humanity. For the man who is with Jesus – and this is man's ontological determination – is with God. If he denies God, he denies himself." (CD III/2, p136). This also explains a shift in Barth's understanding of the *imago Dei*. In his earlier thought, even up to and including Volume I of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth thought that although God created humanity in his image, the Fall meant that the image was totally destroyed. The grace of God restores the likeness of God to us. However, in Volume III as we have just seen, Barth understands humanity in a necessary relationship to God ('Godlessness is... an ontological impossibility for man'), and so, the image does not consist in a quality of humanity which could be destroyed or lost (that is, a prior anthropological category), rather, the image is a 'structured

'basic determination' of human being that secular discourses cannot adequately describe human nature according to their own resources. The definition of 'real man' is what occupies Barth for the rest of the section which he approaches from the perspective of God's action towards humanity.

To recap, in terms of method, Barth has moved consistently towards an understanding of the nature of 'real man' starting from a Christological base. The pressure of interpretation is irreducibly a movement *from* Jesus' humanity *to* our humanity. Barth does not start with a prior conception of humanity into which Jesus fits, but considers the nature of Jesus' humanity which is our true humanity (i.e. as we were created to be), and from this develops six criteria which are to guide enquiry into the nature of humanity (and so his theology takes the form of *Nachdenken*). With reference to secular discourse, it is not that Barth denies the value or insights that are gained from secular discourse, rather that they are only concerned with the 'phenomena of the human'.⁵⁶ Engagement with secular discourse is to be guided by the six criteria that are developed from Christology which will be explored further below.

In terms of content, Barth started by locating the humanity of Jesus in the continuity of his history and consequently his work in the office he holds. On the basis of this Christological ontology, Barth develops six criteria that are to guide his analysis. These criteria are to function as a measure for all conceptions of humanity

relationship'. The image of God is present in humankind by virtue of being created. See Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, pp164f.; David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1953, pp164f.; Price, *Karl Barth's Anthropology*, pp117-119; Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, pp93f..

⁵⁶ "Definitions of man as man interprets himself, however, are not necessarily wrong. Ancient and modern natural science, or rather the respective philosophies of nature, teach us that man must be understood as a definitely peculiar and remarkable factor within the cosmo-terrestrial, the physical-chemical, and the organic biotic processes of universal existence". (Karl Barth, 'The New Humanism and the Humanism of God', in *Theology Today*, 8, 1951-1952, p161.

whether or not they are derived from a theological or non-theological source. Because humankind is both revealed in, and has its ontological determination in Jesus, the ontological status of humankind is determined in and with the being-in-relationship of the man Jesus to God. In short, to be human is to be essentially in relationship to God. Therefore secular discourse cannot account fully for the nature of human being according to Barth's position. The 'basic determination' of human being is in being-with God and this is what is meant by 'real man'.

Up to this point, Barth has been concerned primarily with the vertical relations between God and humankind. In doing this his emphasis has been on *theological* anthropology – human being in covenant-partnership with God. In considering the vertical relations, it is unambiguously clear for Barth that being-in-relationship to God is essential for our humanity. This was determined first by the nature of Christ's humanity and then secondarily in our being with Jesus in election, history, gratitude and responsibility.⁵⁷ There are some strong similarities here with McFadyen's anthropology as we shall see in Chapter 6, but it is worth recalling that it is in the next stage, the horizontal relations, that for McFadyen a theological approach did not seem to be strictly necessary for understanding humanity (although this was of course not his intention). And so we now consider how Barth addresses the horizontal relations.

⁵⁷ It is important to note that this relationship is only part of Barth's theology of relations. Knowledge of self is irreducibly tied to knowledge of God as the God-human relation is dependent upon the intra-trinitarian relations as Father, Son, and Spirit. See Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, pp81-85 noting especially the six-fold determination of humankind as being-in-relationship with God. Cf. also John Calvin who entitles the opening sub-section of his *Institutes* with the words: "The knowledge of God and that of ourselves are connected" (John Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion*, (ed.) John T. McNeill, (trans.) Ford L. Battles, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1960, p35). See also Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957, pp13-22.

3.ii Man in his Determination as the Covenant-Partner of God

In §45, Barth shifts his attention from 'real man' (the vertical relation) to 'humanity' (the horizontal relation). One of his main tasks in his theological anthropology is to show how 'real man' is related to 'humanity'.⁵⁸ In accordance with his method, Barth's starting point is again Jesus, the 'man for other men'. Consequently, we begin with Barth's Christological foundation for understanding humanity and then move on to consider the nature and shape of humanity.

Jesus is true man and true God and is therefore (real) man for God. As true man, Jesus has the true creaturely form of man and thus a true humanity. Barth states his argument early on:

If the divinity of the man Jesus is to be described comprehensively in the statement that He is man for God, His humanity can and must be described no less succinctly in the proposition that He is man for man, for other men, His fellows.⁵⁹

In other words, Jesus is both man for God and man for man. Only Jesus is uniquely and radically to, with, and for others. This has five implications. First, that Jesus is a man means that he is not without his fellow-men. Second, Jesus is sent and ordained by God to be humanity's deliverer and saviour. Third, Jesus' humanity is determined by his divinity and so his person is identified with his mission. Thus, Jesus' humanity is "to do with something ontological".⁶⁰ Fourth, the solidarity with which Jesus is bound to his fellows is wholly real. He is "immediately and directly affected by the existence of his fellows".⁶¹ Fifth, Jesus' being is prescribed, dictated,

⁵⁸ Humankind "exists originally and properly in an inner connexion and correspondence between his divine determination and his creaturely form, between his being as the covenant-partner of God and his being as man". (CD III/2, p205).

⁵⁹ CD III/2, p208.

⁶⁰ CD III/2, p210.

⁶¹ CD III/2, p211. See also the footnote on p211.

and determined by others and their needs. Barth develops this last point by considering six implications of Jesus' humanity which can be summarised thus:⁶²

1) Jesus is *from* humankind in that his humanity is determined by the nature of fallen humanity, and not a humanity that is untouched by sin; 2) Jesus is *to* humankind in that his humanity is exclusively, uniquely, and radically for the benefit, deliverance, and salvation of humankind, and Jesus gives himself entirely to humankind in service; 3) Jesus is *with* humankind in that he is always with others, even those who have not yet heard his name as Master, Messiah, King, and Lord – His humanity is determined by them and for them; 4) Jesus is *for* humankind in that his humanity is from, to, with, and for humankind which is in correspondence with his being from, to, with, and for God in obedience to God and service to His fellows; 5) Jesus *serves* humankind because He is for God who is for humankind in serving the will of God; 6) In Jesus' humanity there is *freedom* because the being of Jesus, and therefore humankind, arises out of the inner structure of the Triune life. Humanity has been taken into the inner life of God ontologically in the Son which is reflected in the being of Jesus *ad extra*.

As the repetition and reflection of God, as divine and human, Jesus is the *imago Dei*. Given that the humanity of Jesus is the image of God, this means the image is only indirectly and not directly identical with God. It presents God in the reality distinct from Himself. Amongst the inner relations of the Trinity, there is unity of essence between the Father and the Son, but not between God and humankind. Thus, there is a distinction or disparity between God and humankind.⁶³ But for all the disparity, there is also correspondence and similarity between the two relationships.

⁶² CD III/2, pp214-219.

⁶³ Many theological anthropologies do not account sufficiently for this disparity as discussed in Chapter 2 above.

In other words, there is no *analogia entis*, but rather an *analogia relationis*.⁶⁴ Barth writes:

The humanity of Jesus, His fellow-humanity, His being for man as the direct correlative of His being for God, indicates, attests and reveals this correspondence and similarity.⁶⁵

Barth correlates the intra-trinitarian relations with Jesus' relations with God and others, and our relations with God and others by the *analogia relationis*. We stated at the outset that Barth's anthropology needs to be located within a theology of relations and this is the crux of it. The *analogia relationis* does not serve as a prior (*a priori*) methodological tool which Barth uses to construct his theology, rather it functions more as a conclusion (*a posteriori*/ *Nachdenken*), or at least a summary of the volume thus far (and possibly from *CD I/1* onwards). Barth rejects an *analogia entis* because it does not recognise the disparity between God and humankind, and because it would be to misrepresent the relational nature of God's and our existence. Relations constitute being. There is no being without being in relation in either the divine or creaturely life. The being of God in Himself is externalised in Jesus Christ so that humanity might be brought into the sphere of and participate in the intra-trinitarian relations.⁶⁶ This means that the analogy only works in one direction, and through it Barth brings together the similarities of the intra-trinitarian relations, the Jesus-God relation, Jesus-others relation, and person to person. It is in this way that Christology can function as a foundation for anthropology.

⁶⁴ Emil Brunner disputes this. See Emil Brunner, 'The New Barth: Observations on Karl Barth's Doctrine of Man', in *SJT*, 4, 1951, p127. For a detailed discussion of Barth's concept of analogy see Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, pp130-141 (with extensive bibliographical footnotes); and Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, Part 3, esp. pp148-168.

⁶⁵ *CD III/2*, p220.

⁶⁶ Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, p95.

Barth turns from the man Jesus to humanity in general: "Christology is not anthropology".⁶⁷ There are both differences and similarities between Jesus' humanity and our humanity. On the one hand, humanity in general cannot be a Deliverer, Saviour, or be for others from the beginning. We observe real humanity from the perspective of sin and alienation, and therefore in contradiction. But on the other hand:

If the humanity of Jesus consists in the fact that He is for other men, this means that for all the disparity between Him and us He affirms these others as beings which are not merely unlike Him in His creaturely existence and therefore His humanity, but also like him *in some basic form*. Where one being is for others, there is necessarily a common sphere or form of existence in which the 'for' can be possible and effective.⁶⁸

In short, for all the disparity between Jesus' humanity and ours, there is a basic creaturely form of humanity that is given by God. This is especially clear when considering covenant-partnership with God. There is no natural capacity to enter into covenant-partnership which humanity has to actualise, rather, humanity is a covenant-partner to the extent that humanity is called and summoned to be so, in and through Jesus' covenant-partnership. In other words, there is a basic form of humanity between the humanity of Jesus and humanity in general that is common to both.

Even in considering the common form of basic humanity, Barth remains thoroughly Christological:

Our criterion in answering this question [What is the basic form of humanity?] is the humanity of the man Jesus. ... in theological anthropology what man is, is decided by the primary text, i.e., by the humanity of the man Jesus. And the application of the criterion means that a whole sphere of supposed humanity is ruled out as non-human from the very first, and cannot be considered.⁶⁹

Barth identifies the common form of basic humanity as being in relation to, with, and for others. We can only see our humanity in relation to others. Only sinful man denies fellow-humanity, although even sinful man stands in the light of Jesus. In

⁶⁷ CD III/2, p222.

⁶⁸ CD III/2, p223 (my italics).

⁶⁹ CD III/2, p226.

short, isolated humanity equals inhumanity.⁷⁰ The basic form of humanity as revealed in the humanity of Jesus is that humanity is essentially a co-humanity. We are who we are only in relationship to others. This is again Christologically rooted:

The humanity of Jesus consists in His being for man. From the fact that this example is binding in humanity generally there follows the broad definition that humanity absolutely, the humanity of each and every man, consists in the determination of man's being as a being with others, or rather with the other man. It is... in fellowship, that he is genuinely human, that he achieves true humanity, that he corresponds to his determination to be God's covenant-partner, that he is the being for which the man Jesus is, and therefore real man.⁷¹

To sum up, humanity is a) a determination of human being (created by God for covenant-partnership); b) a being with others (primarily in Jesus, and secondarily in our humanity); c) a being of one man with the other (never in isolation).⁷² Thus, the recognition of our humanity is dependent upon the recognition of the humanity of the other and it is this that Barth develops in some detail.⁷³

Barth reflects on what it means to say 'I am', which he locates in Jesus' 'I am' sayings in the Fourth Gospel.⁷⁴ Three steps can be identified. First: "The mere fact that I say 'I' means that I describe and distinguish the object to which I say it as something like myself; in other words, that with my 'I' I also address him as 'Thou'".⁷⁵ Put differently, I am in distinction and connexion to the other and I am therefore as I am in relation. Second: "I am in encounter with the other who is the same way as I am".⁷⁶ Or again, "at the very root of my being and from the very first I am in encounter with the being of the Thou, under his claim and with my own being constituting a claim upon him".⁷⁷ This means that in the 'I-Thou' relation, there is a mutual reflection of persons in one another as distinct from each other which takes the

⁷⁰ Barth looks to Nietzsche as an example of man without fellow humanity, and thus as sinful man. See CD III/2, pp231-242.

⁷¹ CD III/2, p243.

⁷² CD III/2, p243.

⁷³ At this point there are some strong similarities between Barth's and McFadyen's anthropologies.

⁷⁴ CD III/2, p244. This is in distinction from the 'I am' when considered in isolation like Nietzsche's (CD III/2, pp231-242).

⁷⁵ CD III/2, p244.

⁷⁶ CD III/2, p246.

⁷⁷ CD III/2, p247.

form of a kind of confrontation between the I and the Thou and the Thou and the I. 'Encounter' means, and this is the third step, "I am as Thou art".⁷⁸ Humankind is essentially a being-in-relationship of a personal nature and this occurs in a history. "To say man is to say history, and this is to speak of the encounter between the I and the Thou".⁷⁹

Stuart McLean is overstating the case when he writes referring to this section:

The nuanced discussion of dialogical-dialectical relationships between persons, while building on Martin Buber's discussion, goes beyond it and forms the most perceptive and profound discussion of the meaning of humanity that I have seen in Western literature, theological or non-theological.⁸⁰

However, McLean does point us in an important direction. This is one point in Barth's theological anthropology where he builds explicitly on some non-theological approaches, in this case, Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber.⁸¹ In fact, for all the indebtedness to non-theological approaches, some of Barth's critics have failed to see the Christological basis for Barth's explication of the 'I and Thou'.⁸² This is, in other words, a key point for considering the relation between theological and secular discourse.

We have seen from the outset that Barth has rooted his anthropology in Christology which is the ontological determination of humanity. In doing this, Barth has not adopted a prior conception of humanity about which he theologises, rather, the notion of humanity is itself determined theologically, crucially *a posteriori*. The heart

⁷⁸ CD III/2, p248.

⁷⁹ CD III/2, p248.

⁸⁰ McLean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth*, p40.

⁸¹ Martin Buber's thought is of course theological. As mentioned in Chapter 1 above, the main distinction of this thesis between theological and secular (non-theological) discourse does not always capture Barth's thought well. It is in a strict sense, i.e., the understanding of theology that we find in Barth, that I refer to Buber's thought as non-theological.

⁸² According to Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, p103n. Deddo does not give any examples. Although he is not entirely clear about Barth on this issue, one example may be Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, (trans.) Matthew J. O'Connell, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985, pp183-184. Similarly, Ray S. Anderson, in his highly informative book largely based on Barth's anthropology, does not mention the Christological basis at this point (*On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982, pp45-46).

of Barth's argument is that non-theological accounts cannot account adequately for the nature of humanity because at least one major aspect is discounted *a priori* (the vertical relation – 'real man'). In other words, it is because being-with-God is the 'basic determination' of human being that secular discourses cannot adequately describe human nature. However, it has also been pointed out that Barth is not opposed to secular discourse *per se*. On the contrary, insofar as it goes, and the relation between the 'I' and 'Thou' is the case in point, secular discourse can be highly informative. It is worth repeating that in this section Barth is so dependent upon secular approaches that some critics have not recognised the Christological grounding. Barth's argument is not that secular discourses are worthless (although they are not concerned with true humanity), rather, that they are only concerned with the 'phenomena of man', a point to which we shall return later. The point at this juncture is this. Here, as in all of Barth's theological anthropology, the ultimate criterion for the adequacy and validity of his anthropology is Jesus Christ. Later Barth writes in this regard:

theological anthropology has the advantage over this better knowledge of the natural man [viz. non-theological approaches] that it possesses a criterion – its knowledge of divine grace and the man Jesus – which allows and commands it from the very outset and with final resoluteness and clarity to turn its back on that worse knowledge and ignorance, and from the very first and necessarily and therefore with final consistency to move in the direction of the conception of humanity and therefore of human nature according to which man as such and radically is not without but with the fellow-man, and his humanity at its deepest and highest level consists in the freedom of his heart for the other.⁸³

Following from this, we can also recognise the parallel between the fourfold characterisation of being-in-encounter and the last three Christological characteristics of Jesus' being for God by his gratefully recognising God's Lordship, being obedient and responsible, and his being a servant of God gladly in freely serving others.⁸⁴ In

⁸³ CD III/2, pp277-278n.

⁸⁴ For this point I am indebted to Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, p106.

other words, the Christological ground is also evident in Barth's structure.⁸⁵ We can now recognise a correspondence between the vertical and horizontal relationships of humanity. As humankind participates in relationship with God in gratitude, responsibility, and freedom, humankind also participates in relationships with others in gratitude, responsibility, and freedom. In service of God, humankind is lead to service of others, and thus participates in the gift of humanity.

Barth goes on to consider in greater depth the nature of fellow-humanity especially in terms of sexual differentiation.⁸⁶ As this section does not add much to the discussion of his method this will not be considered here. Volume III/2 contains two other sections which are concerned with humankind's relationship to itself, or whole man (Man as Soul and Body), and humankind's relationship to time (Man in his Time).⁸⁷ Although important for Barth's anthropology as a whole these sections do not add greatly to the structure or methodology that has been outlined and so will not be considered here either. However, it is worth emphasising again that in these two sections, like the two preceding sections, Barth discusses his themes by opening with a subsection on Jesus.

To recap, in relation to content, Barth's concern shifts from 'real man' (the vertical relation) to 'humanity' (the horizontal relation). Again, Barth's anthropology

⁸⁵ Contra J. G. Gibbs, 'A Secondary Point of Reference in Barth's Anthropology', *SJT*, 16, 1963, pp132-135.

⁸⁶ CD III/2, pp285-324. Barth's discussion of male/female relationships goes against contemporary sensibilities and has consequently received much criticism for it. For an attempt to interpret Barth's male/female differentiation within his theology of relations as a whole see Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, pp119-130. Additionally, many commentators have not recognised the full range of Barth's theology of relations which is often assumed to end with the male/ female relations. In fact, the parent/ child relation occupies approximately one third of Barth's entire anthropology. Again Deddo brings this out well (esp. pp187-260).

⁸⁷ On humankind as soul and body see Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, pp161f. (which is one of the main sections in Barth where the agency of the Holy Spirit is clearly evident). On relation to time see F. W. Camfield, 'Man in His Time', in *SJT*, 3, 1950, pp127-148; Klaas Runia, 'Karl Barth on Man in His Time', in *Reformed Theological Review*, 17, 1958, pp1-11.

is rooted in Christology. Jesus is true man and true God and is therefore real man for God. As such Jesus has the true creaturely form of man and is both man for God and man for man. Jesus is, therefore, from, to, with, and for humankind. Although there is a distinction and disparity between God and humankind, there is also a correspondence which receives its fullest expression in Jesus who is the image of God. There is, in other words, an *analogia relationis* between God and humanity which moves in an irreversible direction.

The continuity between Jesus' humanity and our humanity is that the humanity of Jesus consists in the fact that he is for other men, and so our humanity is like his in a 'basic form'. The basic form of humanity is in being in relation to, with, and for others. Our humanity is only evident in relation to others, the negation of which is inhumanity or sinful humanity. Humanity is therefore essentially co-humanity. Barth develops the relationship between the self and the other in some detail for which he is highly indebted to secular thought.

In relation to form, the same method that was clear regarding 'real man' is also operative – deriving anthropology from Christology. However, there are a few differences here. First, Barth identifies both the continuity and discontinuity between Jesus' humanity and our humanity which means that we only correspond to him in certain ways, i.e., in the basic form of humanity as co-humanity. We cannot be Saviour or Deliverer. However, in the basic form of humanity, there is a correspondence with Jesus humanity, as well as with the intra-trinitarian relations, and so the continuity can be seen in the structure of relations.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Hence Barth's doctrine of the original, first, and second *imago Dei*; that is, the original intra-trinitarian relation of Father, Son, and Spirit (the original image), the corresponding relationship of humanity to God and to each other in Jesus (the first image), and humanity's becoming of the image in human existence through human to human relationships (the second image). See esp. a transcription of Barth in John D. Godsey, *Karl Barth's Table Talk*, London & Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962, p57,

Second, in expounding the *analogia relationis*, the underlying trinitarian ontology receives greater significance. The orders of knowing and being are constantly intertwined in Barth, and in the exposition of the sections of his anthropology, Christology has received far greater attention. Jesus Christ is both the noetic source and ontological determination of humanity. However, although the Trinity does not appear to be operatively constitutive of humanity, God as Trinity is the ultimate grounding for humanity and theological method (hence Barth opens his Dogmatics with the doctrine of the Trinity).⁸⁹

And finally, Barth's consideration of humanity is in some ways more revealing. In the section on the phenomena of man, Barth criticised various non-theological approaches on the basis of the six Christological criteria he developed. In developing his section on the basic form of humanity as co-humanity, Barth made extensive use of secular discourses to the extent that some critics missed the Christological grounding for the section. The point is that Barth does recognise the multifaceted nature of human existence. However, theological anthropology for Barth is shaped by the way he understands the biblical witness to human nature. The determinative factor is Jesus Christ and so all other factors are relative to Christ. Consequently, all knowledge (including both theological and non-theological discourses) about any aspect of human existence will be seen in its true sense only when comprehended in terms of this determinative factor.⁹⁰

cited in Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, p96. See also *CD III/2*, pp219-220; and Cairns, *The Image of God in Man*, pp167f..

⁸⁹ The trinitarian grounding for Barth's anthropology is explicit in *CD III/2* although he does not develop it. Deddo is particularly strong on highlighting both the Christological and trinitarian foundations for anthropology (*Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, Parts 1 and 2, *passim.*, e.g. pp54f.). See also Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*; Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord*, pp87f.; Torrance, *Persons in Communion*; Williams, 'Barth on the Triune God'.

⁹⁰ Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, p11n.

Having considered some of the main facets of Barth's anthropology, it is now possible to consider in more detail the relation between theological and secular discourses in Barth's thought.

4. Secular Discourse in Barth's Anthropology

In this section I will briefly review the key loci of Barth's theological method as evident in his anthropology, consider more specifically the relation between theological and secular discourse in four sections of his anthropology, and finally, cast a more critical eye towards Barth's approach.

4.i Method in Barth's Theological Anthropology

The methodological loci that were identified in the whole of Barth's thought were also apparent in his theological anthropology. First, Barth's anthropology was clearly grounded in his Christology. Barth did not operate with a prior concept of humankind, rather, an understanding of 'true humanity' was developed by first looking at Jesus' humanity.⁹¹ Jesus Christ functions as the noetic source and ontological determination of Barth's anthropology. Second, Barth's anthropology is not only grounded in Christology but also the doctrine of the Trinity. In Barth's

⁹¹ "[In founding anthropology on Christology,] we leave the traditional way, which was to try first to establish generally what human nature is, and on this basis to interpret the human nature of Jesus Christ in particular [e.g. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*; and the structure of Jürgen Moltmann, *Man: Christian Anthropology in the Conflicts of the Present*, (trans.) John Sturdy, London: SPCK, 1974]. Our whole approach to the relation between human sin and human nature has led us irresistibly in the opposite direction. Human sin excludes us from understanding human nature except by a new disclosure through the perception of divine grace addressed to man and revealing and affirming true humanity in the midst of human sin, i.e., a disclosure which is genuinely new, involving faith in the divine revelation. But if we ask where we may find an authentic revelation in this respect, we are not led to man in general but to the man in particular, and in supreme particularity to the one man Jesus. Thus, contrary to the usual procedure, we must first enquire concerning this one man, and then on this basis concerning man in general." (CD III/2, p44n).

thought, the Trinity cannot be considered in isolation from the incarnate Jesus, nor the incarnate Jesus in isolation from the triune being of God. Although the trinitarian grounding for Barth's anthropology was not stressed here – other than perhaps through the *analogia relationis* – Barth's anthropology is rooted in an understanding of God as Trinity.⁹² And finally, given Barth's grounding of his anthropology in Christology and trinitarian theology, his anthropology takes the form of *Nachdenken*. It is important to emphasise again that Barth's method is derived in response to the nature of the Word of God and does not function as a prior structure for his content.⁹³ The pressure of interpretation is irreducibly from God to humankind.

4.ii Secular Discourse in Barth's Theological Anthropology

Having identified some of the key methodological loci operative in Barth's theological anthropology, we can now consider more specifically the relation between theological and secular discourse in Barth's anthropology. There are four main sections that are especially informative in *III/2*. The first section addresses some general methodological considerations about the relation between theological and secular discourse and the second focuses on the specific role of non-theological anthropologies in theological anthropology. Because of the methodological significance of these two sections they will be treated at greater length. The third section is essentially a negative critique of secular discourse on the basis of theological criteria (the phenomena of man), and the final section in a more positive assessment of the relationship (the I-Thou relationship). These will be taken in turn.

⁹² The trinitarian grounding for Barth's anthropology is set out in Price, *Karl Barth's Anthropology*, pp18-20, 57-58, 109-111, 132-138, 144, 231f.; and esp. Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*, pp15-35, 39-40, 54-56, 72-75, 159f., 174, 177, etc..

⁹³ See *CD I/2*, p861.

1. *General methodological considerations.* Barth opens his volume on anthropology by asserting that anthropology is concerned with humanity as placed in the cosmos. As such, anthropology for Barth has a cosmic character, but emphatically does not outline a cosmology or worldview. Barth writes:

dogmatics has neither the occasion nor the duty to become a technical cosmology or a Christian world-view. Were it to do so, it would be losing its way in a sphere essentially foreign to it. Its true object is the revealed, written and declared Word of God. Those who have claimed to have a world-view... have always derived it from other sources than the Word of God. Here at the outset we part company with the exponents of all world-views.⁹⁴

The primacy of the Word of God in Barth's theological method is again clear. The point is that the relationship between theological and secular discourse in Barth's thought is a *direct result* of his theological method. Barth explores this further in setting out five points about the relation between theologies – that are derived from its object – and cosmologies (secular discourse). In summary form these are:

a) [F]aith which grasps the Word of God... has never yet engendered its own distinctive world-view, but in this respect has always made more or less critical use of alien world-views.

b) [F]aith in the Word of God can never find its theme in the totality of the created world.

c) From the fact that faith, committed to its own special theme, can give only incidental attention to creation as a whole, it follows that its relation to the cosmological presuppositions and consequences of its witness and confession could and can only be supremely non-committal. ... It can pass from one world-view to another without being untrue to itself, i.e., to its object.⁹⁵

d) Even where... we think we detect an absolute union of faith with this or that world-view, we are not really dealing with faith at all, but with a partial deviation from faith such as is always possible in the life of the Church and of individuals.

e) In so far as faith itself is true to itself, i.e., to its object, and in so far as its confession is pure, its association with this or that world-view will always bear the marks of the contradiction between the underlying confession and the principles of the system with which it is conjoined.⁹⁶

We are now in a position to see what is meant by what McFadyen calls 'the Barthian priority of God in theological method'. The *ultimate* criterion for faith that is true to its object in theological method is the Word of God. However, faith may

⁹⁴ CD III/2, p6.

⁹⁵ In a footnote Barth goes on: "In this respect we might go so far as to say that faith is radically disloyal to them [world-views]" (p9n).

⁹⁶ CD III/2, pp7-10.

also function with *operative* criteria that are derived from elsewhere (secular discourse). The point is that the operative criteria are governed by the ultimate criterion, and so the object of theology which determines both the form and content of theology has ultimate priority even though it may not have operative priority at a given moment. Because of this framework, faith can even be 'disloyal' to world-views, that is, use secular discourse to expound aspects of faith without adopting the framework of that discourse. At the same time, faith does not offer a world-view, or what we would now call a 'meta-narrative', rather, it moves from the particular to the universal. For Barth, this does not mean offering (an *a priori*) universal framework for interpreting theology and culture, rather, on the basis of (*a posteriori*) particulars of faith (especially the incarnate Christ), considers what this means for the current context. It is also notable within the context of this thesis – that is, a dialogue between theological and secular discourse – that for Barth, a *union* of faith with another world-view is a deviation from faith. However, to use secular discourse to *expound* aspects of faith where the primary or ultimate loyalty rests with the form and content being determined by the object of faith, is part of Christian tradition. To use John Thompson's words, "all thought schemes or philosophies may be used as servants but not as masters, not as forms which bring an outside frame of reference or criterion to bear on the biblical testimony to divine revelation".⁹⁷

The general consideration of the relation between theological and secular discourse in Barth is further illuminated with regard to exact science. Barth first makes the point that theology is in this sense in basic opposition to philosophy, but is closer methodologically to the inductive sciences which are based on observation and inference. He then makes three points which again I quote in summary form.

⁹⁷ Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, p10.

Genuine science has the following points in common with genuine theological scholarship.⁹⁸

a) It does not carry with it any world-view. It is content to observe, classify, investigate, understand and describe phenomena. It does not unfold any ontology of the cosmos. To the extent that it does so it becomes an interpretation, and ceases to be an exact science. ... There is no scientific world view.⁹⁹

b) Exact science also agrees with the theology of creation in the fact that it too investigates and describes the cosmos only as the cosmos of man, that for it too the cosmos exists only anthropocentrically: not of course from the standpoint of the Christian faith in God's Word and therefore not theanthropocentrically; but from the standpoint of human observation and inference, of which it clearly recognises the limits.

c) It recognises two fundamentally distinct spheres. ... It does not call them heaven and earth, but no less than theology it recognises the distinction between heaven and earth.¹⁰⁰

Barth has often been charged with not engaging sufficiently with the natural sciences – a point which T. F. Torrance tried to address¹⁰¹ – but this quotation indicates the basis of Barth's approach. It is worth further drawing out the methodological significance of these three points.¹⁰² First, neither theology nor the natural sciences functions with *a priori* assumptions about a specific world-view.¹⁰³ Both disciplines let the object determine the method of enquiry and therefore the content. In this way, both let the particular determine the universal and are functionally *a posteriori*. Second, both theological and exact sciences operate anthropocentrically. In this context, 'anthropocentric' is a positive term for Barth as the Word of God focuses on both God and human beings. Both theology and exact science are the result of particular activity of human beings and are in this respect anthropocentric. It is also worth noting the opposite implication, that is, the limit imposed on anthropocentric enquiry. For exact science this means that it cannot make statements that go beyond the boundaries of the cosmos, whereas theology, in being

⁹⁸ In this context, 'genuine' means having the method of enquiry determined by the object.

⁹⁹ Although Barth does have a point in his distinction between the world-views of philosophy and exact sciences, even the most exact sciences do have a world view. This has been explored in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (trans.) Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Guildford and King's Lynn: Manchester University Press, 1992, esp. Chapter 7.

¹⁰⁰ CD III/2, pp12-13n.

¹⁰¹ Torrance, *Karl Barth*; Torrance, *Theological Science*; Thomas F. Torrance (ed.), *Belief in Science and in Christian Life*, Edinburgh: Handsel, 1980; Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985.

¹⁰² See Price, *Karl Barth's Anthropology*, pp102-111.

¹⁰³ Again I note that Barth is not entirely consistent here. See Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, esp. pp116-119, and Williams, 'Barth on the Triune God', pp157f..

'theanthropocentric', refers to the fact that human being is to be understood as a creature in relation to God. And finally, in recognising two distinct spheres, both theological and exact science both have clear boundaries within which they operate. For exact sciences this means that they are to be concerned with the physical universe (whether or not they recognise the heavenly sphere). For theological science this means that creation is to be considered in terms of its relation to God.¹⁰⁴ This general theological framework can be seen to function more specifically in relation to theological and non-theological anthropologies.

2. *Theological and non-theological anthropologies.* The 'problem of man' is a problem not just for theology, but for much of human thinking. Therefore Barth considers briefly some of the methodological underpinnings of two main types of non-theological anthropology. These will be taken in turn.

The *first* type of non-theological anthropology is the 'speculative theory of man'. Regardless of its foundations (whether in exact science or self-intuition), speculative anthropologies belong "to the context of a world-view".¹⁰⁵ They go beyond the hypotheses of exact science treating them as axiomatic principles which provide a framework for understanding the whole. Barth locates speculative anthropology somewhere between 'myth' and 'philosophy'. Barth expounds the underlying method:

man supposes that he can begin absolutely with himself, i.e., his own judgement, and then legitimately and necessarily push forward until he finally reaches an absolute synthesis, a system of truth exhaustive of reality as a whole. On this assumption he also and primarily thinks that he can know and analyse himself. ... He thinks that in some way he can know himself. Anthropology on this basis is the doctrine of man in which man is confident that he can be both teacher and the pupil of the truth. ... The essential point, however, is not its attitude to this idea [of reference to God], but the fact that this teaching has its origin in that arid corner;

¹⁰⁴ "The Word of God has a cosmological border. It illuminates the world. It makes it know – heaven and earth – as the sphere in which God's glory dwells and in which He concerns Himself with man. It understands and explains it as one great parable of this happening. ..." (CD, III/2, p11).

¹⁰⁵ CD III/2, p22.

that here at the start of human self-knowledge stands man himself in his unlimited self-confidence either with or without the thought of God, or with this thought or that.¹⁰⁶

Barth does not consider it his place to engage with speculative anthropologies as they are rooted in a methodology that is close to the essence of sin – it originates in human self-confidence, is dependent upon *cor incurvatum in se* (Luther), and does not identify the essence and nature of humanity (which cannot be found apart from reference to the Word of God). As such, Barth considers speculative anthropologies to be an 'enemy' to Christian confession.

Barth is more positive towards the *second* type of non-theological anthropology, the 'exact science of man': "Man, too, is an object – one among many, but nevertheless the nearest object – of the physiological and biological, psychological and sociological sciences".¹⁰⁷ As an exact science, the second type of non-theological anthropology maintains a sense of relativity, that is, it refrains from "consolidating its formulae and hypotheses as axioms and therefore treating them as revealed dogmas".¹⁰⁸ The concern of exact science will always be with the appearance rather than being of humanity, that is, the outer not the inner, and will emphatically not address the totality of humanity, rather, partial phenomena. Barth writes:

Strictly speaking, what physiology and biology, psychology and sociology can offer, will not be statements to the effect that man in his physical, psychological and sociological existence is or is not this or that, but statements to the effect that man as a phenomenon is to be seen and understood by man according to this or that standpoint and in this or that aspect of his constitution and development, as determined by current knowledge of these facts accessible to human enquiry. Scientific anthropology gives us precise information and relevant data which can be of service in the wider investigation of the nature of man, and can help build to build up a technique for dealing with these questions. Since it is itself a human activity, it presupposes that man is, and what he is, and on this basis shows him as to how he is, in what limits and under what conditions he can exist as the being he is. It is not concerned with his reality, let alone with its philosophical foundation and explanation.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ CD III/2, p22. This citation includes a clear reference to Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*. See ft. 48 for further references.

¹⁰⁷ CD III/2, p23.

¹⁰⁸ CD III/2, p23.

¹⁰⁹ CD III/2, p24.

Insofar as the second type of anthropology remains within the limits of its enquiry, i.e., does not strive to offer a world-view or become axiomatic, dogmatic, and speculative, it "cannot be the enemy of the Christian confession".¹¹⁰ In other words, this kind of non-theological anthropology can play an important role in theological anthropology as long as it is concerned with humankind in relation to the natural order and not God or ultimate reality.¹¹¹ Within the context of theological anthropology, so long as the ultimate criteria are derived from the Word of God, the exact science of humankind has a place.

The main difference between theological and non-theological anthropologies is that theological anthropology considers humanity in relation to God. There are two main methodological implications of this for Barth. First, "even the fact that man is the creation of God, standing as such in special relation to God, is a fact not accessible to human thought and perception otherwise through the Word of God".¹¹² This means, as we have seen at length above, that humankind can only be properly understood within the context of Christian revelation which means being determined by Christology. Second:

the revelation of God does not show us man as we wish to see him, in the wholeness of his created being, but in its perversion and corruption. The truth of man's being as revealed in the Word of God and attested generally by Holy Scripture shows us man as a betrayer of himself and a sinner against his creaturely existence. ... his real situation in the sight of God is that he is the one who contradicts the purpose of God and therefore himself, distorting and corrupting his own being.¹¹³

A further reason for grounding theological anthropology in Christology is that under the conditions of sin, not only are we incapable of seeing our true humanity, but we are also incapable of recognising ourselves as sinners.¹¹⁴ The revelation of

¹¹⁰ *CD* III/2, p24.

¹¹¹ It may even be "relevant, interesting, important and legitimate" (*CD* III/2, p79).

¹¹² *CD* III/2, p25.

¹¹³ *CD* III/2, p26.

¹¹⁴ "Only when we know Jesus Christ do we really know that man is the man of sin, and what sin is. And what it means for man" (*CD*, IV/1, p389).

humanity in sin *is itself* a product of revelation and cannot be determined apart from revelation. This will be examined at length in the next chapter, but the important point here is that apart from the Word of God there is no possibility of offering an account of true humanity.

Before considering more briefly how Barth actually does integrate theological and secular discourse, it is worth summarizing the main points thus far.¹¹⁵ First, theological anthropology begins with dogmatics not an *a priori* philosophy, cosmology, or speculative world-view. Barth's theology begins with God's self-revelation, and as we have seen at length, his view of humankind derives from this as revealed in the incarnate Christ. In this way, Barth's anthropology stands in stark contrast to most other theological anthropologies which tend to move in the opposite direction.¹¹⁶ As we have now seen, this has significant implications for the relationship between theological and secular discourse which perhaps culminates in theology maintaining the ultimate criteria, but being somewhat flexible with operative criteria.

Second, theological anthropology respects the boundaries between itself and secular discourse. In each case the boundary is determined by the object of enquiry. There are points of similarity between theology and the natural sciences (less so for philosophy and speculative anthropology for Barth) which opens the possibility for a dialogue. However, there are also points where theological and non-theological discourses are simply incompatible. Theology must begin with its own premises which from the perspective of a position outside that of faith may well be unacceptable. In theological anthropology, a core assumption is that humankind is fallen and that although sin may be used as a model for understanding the human

¹¹⁵ For these points I am indebted to Price, *Karl Barth's Anthropology*, pp116-117.

¹¹⁶ One example of this is Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*.

situation, the extent of human depravity and the recognition of it is a revealed truth. To some extent McFadyen's aim was to verify empirically the descriptive and explanatory power of the doctrine of sin, but for him, and even more so for Barth, knowledge of sin (and ourselves) derives from knowledge of God.¹¹⁷ Put differently, the doctrine of sin may have empirically verifiable descriptive and explanatory power, but the doctrine itself cannot be derived apart from special revelation (although it may be criticised and challenged by secular discourse).¹¹⁸

Third, knowledge of 'real man' or 'true humanity' can only come from the Word of God. Only the Word of God reveals the reality of human sin and corruption as we shall see at length in the next chapter. This means that non-theological approaches can only be concerned with the phenomena or symptoms of humanity without capturing 'true humanity'. However, there is one respect in which Barth may not be quite right, that is, with regard to his view of 'speculative' anthropologies. He may be right about the dogmatic and axiomatic claims of speculative anthropologies, but they can accurately describe the symptoms or phenomena of humanity as can be seen in most art forms. Having identified some of the key methodological points of Barth's engagement with non-theological anthropologies, let us now turn more briefly to two instances of actual engagement with them in III/2.

¹¹⁷ The use of sin as an empirical model is not new in McFadyen, not even with reference to Barth. See Fred Berthold Jr., 'Theology and Self-Understanding: The Christian Model of Man as a Sinner', in Peter Homans (ed.), *The Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology: Essays in Divinity, Volume III*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp11-32. Price also uses secular discourse (psychology) to criticise Barth's theological anthropology (*Karl Barth's Anthropology, passim*). Unfortunately, Price focuses mainly on the points of similarity between theological and non-theological approaches which means that he fails to see the significance of what a distinctly *theological* anthropology can offer the dialogue (he focuses almost entirely on the 'human-human' relations and not the 'God-human' relation which is primary in Barth). This is where McFadyen's approach exceeds most other approaches.

¹¹⁸ As in Berthold, 'Theology and Self-Understanding'.

3. *The phenomena of man.* In Chapter 2 on McFadyen's anthropology, it was suggested that McFadyen did not engage sufficiently with enough forms of secular discourse being largely dependent upon Rom Harré's thought. It was also suggested that ironically Barth takes the breadth and content of secular discourse more seriously than McFadyen. McFadyen is more dialogically orientated than Barth, and yet it is Barth who in the final analysis does more justice to secular discourse in large part by recognising and maintaining clear boundaries between the forms of discourse. In fact, in one place in III/2 alone Barth devotes over fifty pages specifically to this task to the extent that one commentator writes: "Barth [is] obviously enjoying himself here".¹¹⁹ This is the section in which Barth deals with the 'phenomena of man'.

From the exposition of Barth above, it is clear that Barth addresses the 'phenomena of man' immediately after developing six criteria for theological enquiry that are derived from Christology. In his analysis, Barth first addresses the secular approaches on their own terms and then criticises them according to the theological criteria previously outlined. In doing so, Barth evaluates other anthropologies on the basis of the theological method that he has developed. For instance, Barth begins by looking to Polanus with whom he illustrates that anthropology based on self-observation cannot lead to real man and culminates in a vicious circle.¹²⁰ In Chapter 1 it was mentioned that the distinction between theological and secular discourse is not always the most appropriate for Barth. His concern is more with the extent to which all thinking is determined by the Word of God, hence he does not distinguish between theological and secular discourse. Consequently, some approaches which are theological may be dealt with here under 'secular discourse' because they share the same basic methodological approach (for example Emil Brunner).

¹¹⁹ W. A. Whitehouse, 'The Nature of Man', in 'The Christian View of Man: An Examination of Karl Barth's Doctrine', *SJT*, 2, 1949, p62, referring to *CD* III/2, pp76-132.

¹²⁰ *CD* III/2, pp76-77.

The breadth of Barth's engagement with other anthropologies becomes clear when he examines four main anthropological approaches of the modern period: naturalism (Zöckler, Otto, Titius, and Portmann); idealism (Fichte); existentialism (Jaspers); and theistic anthropology (Brunner).¹²¹ Naturalism, Barth argues, is unable to establish humanity's distinctiveness in relation to other creatures, pointing at best to human phenomena. Idealism operates within the field of self-knowledge and so it is unable to stand the test of the six criteria.¹²² Barth finds the transcendent point of reference in existentialism more promising, but identifies it as ultimately resting in humankind itself. And finally, although not 'secular', Barth finds that theistic anthropology to meet many of his criteria, but it fails on three counts:¹²³ it does not need the God of self-revelation as the transcendent other; it finds the reality of humanity in freedom of choice, not obedience; and it offers only potentiality, not actuality.

There is much to be gained from an in depth analysis of Barth's engagement with these schools of thought, but his method is clear from this overview. What has not been brought out here is where Barth is more positive towards these schools of thought. In each of them he finds much that he likes, usually insofar as they are describing the 'phenomena of man', but he finds them all to be flawed according to his criteria. Of course his criteria could be rejected and the starting point could be placed elsewhere, but for Barth as we have now seen at length, anthropology can only derive from Christology. Therefore, Barth's analysis of these secular discourses tends

¹²¹ CD III/2, pp78-132. It is worth noting that Barth's critique of secular discourse is not restricted to this section. Indeed some of his most significant criticisms appear elsewhere in the volume, such as his well-known critique of Nietzsche (pp231-242).

¹²² "The god in whom Fichtean man believes is himself, his own mind, the spirit of the protesting voice in which he puts his confidence and in the power of which he knows himself to be free. ... Fichte's god is Fichte's man, and Fichte's man is Fichte's god." (CD III/2, pp108-109n).

¹²³ Adapted from Bromiley's summary (Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, p126).

to be negative. A more positive approach can be seen clearly in his analysis of the I-Thou relationship.

4. *The I-Thou Relationship.* This aspect of Barth's thought has already been explored above. Two important factors became clear. First, where secular discourse was in accordance with his six criteria, Barth was more than happy to incorporate it at length into his theology. At the very least this shows that Barth is far from opposed to secular discourse *per se*. Second, there are aspects of anthropology and human nature that are common to both theological and non-theological approaches.¹²⁴ We have just seen how secular discourse can describe the phenomena or symptoms of humanity, but there are other aspects of human nature that are common to both theological and non-theological approaches such as the recognition of agape and eros.¹²⁵

Before considering briefly some possible weaknesses in Barth's anthropology and seeing how they are related to the relationship between theological and secular discourse, it is worth clarifying further a number of points arising from this subsection. First, having seen in some detail how Barth's approach interacts with a number of forms of secular discourse – philosophy, the inductive sciences, the social sciences, and various approaches to anthropology – it is important to clarify further some possible differences between them. Barth states quite clearly that theology can be understood as being in basic opposition to philosophy. This is not because Barth is opposed to the use of philosophy in theology, it should be evident by now that this is emphatically not the case, rather his point is that theology is closer methodologically

¹²⁴ Not surprisingly, Emil Brunner asks whether Barth's view that there is a quality of humanity that can be apprehended by non-Christians amounts to a 'point of contact'? See Brunner, 'The New Barth', pp130-132.

¹²⁵ CD III/2, pp274-285n.

to the inductive sciences which are based on observation and inference. Philosophy can be used as a theological tool in a number of respects – by offering analytical tools, logic, insight into the human condition, world-views, and so on – but, unlike the inductive sciences, Barth argues that it is not content to ‘observe, classify, investigate, understand and describe phenomena’. The core problem that Barth finds with philosophy is that it carries with it an inherent world-view and offers an ‘interpretation’ of phenomena rather than a ‘description’.

In this regard, Barth has more time for the social sciences. With the exception of ‘speculative anthropologies’ which Barth dismisses, the social sciences can be seen as closer to the inductive sciences in that they ‘observe, classify, investigate, understand and describe [the] phenomena [of the human]’. Consequently, in his anthropology, Barth used insights derived from the social sciences (and some philosophy) in order to describe aspects of the phenomena of the human – especially the nature of relations. Put bluntly, philosophy tends to have more significance for Barth in terms of wider theological concerns, whereas the social sciences help in the specific task of describing the phenomena of the human and, to a lesser extent, expounding the doctrine of sin as we shall see shortly.

It is also worth noting that Barth’s shift in emphasis from his engagement with philosophy in his earlier thought to consider a far wider range of secular discourses, represents more than simply a change in dialogue partner (although it is undoubtedly this – and the choice of dialogue partner is itself determined in large part by the theological doctrine being expounded), rather this shift can be interpreted as a development of his thought. On the one hand, given the methodological purity of his approach, Barth does not need to distinguish between different types of secular discourse because his concern is with the extent to which all thought forms conform

to the Word of God. On the other hand, however, there is a difference in the use of secular discourse by theology. So for example, philosophy is not used by Barth to expound aspects of the phenomena of the human unlike the social sciences and the social sciences are not used to offer categories or language for thinking through key doctrines. Even though Barth does not develop this, there are a variety of ways in which secular discourse can be useful for theology, but for Barth, they are always the servant not the master. The point is that Barth increasingly uses more diverse forms of secular discourse in his thinking (which are governed by his theology), but does not offer extensive resources for evaluating the significance of this diversity.

Second, having offered further clarification of the relationship between theology and particular forms of secular discourse in Barth's anthropology, it is now important to restate how Barth conceives of the relation between theology and secular discourse more broadly. The key point with regard to all forms of secular discourse for Barth is that secular discourse cannot offer a full account of anthropology, sin, or any broadly theological theme, because it misses a crucial element – that creation stands before God and is in relation to God. For anthropology this means that the social sciences, for instance, can only describe the phenomena of the human as we have now seen in considerable length throughout this chapter. To restate the basic elements of Barth's method with regard to secular discourse, the *ultimate* criterion for all theological enquiry is that it is true to its object – the Word of God, but it may function with *operative* criteria that are derived from elsewhere (secular discourse). John Thompson is worth quoting again, "all thought schemes or philosophies may be used as servants but not as masters, not as forms which bring an outside frame of reference or criterion to bear on the biblical testimony to divine revelation".¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, p10.

And finally, a brief word on apologetics. It should be clear by now that Barth emphatically rejects any form of apologetics insofar as apologetics can be understood as offering some kind of a defence of the Christian faith according to the canons of secular rationality. For Barth, as for McFadyen, the core task of theology vis-à-vis secular discourse, is to borrow selectively from the secular in order to expound aspects of theology. In doing this, theology may well offer distinctive illumination to aspects of 'secular discourse', as indeed was the case in McFadyen's approach. Insofar as this can be understood as apologetics, both Barth and McFadyen would welcome this particular task. However, it should be emphasised that Barth (and to a lesser extent McFadyen) has no desire to, and in fact finds it theologically abhorrent, to try to demonstrate consistency with, or somehow validate the content of theology according to secular insights. Neither Barth's nor McFadyen's approaches to secular discourse are driven by apologetic concerns although their approaches may indeed have some significance for apologetics.

4.iii Possible Weaknesses?

The relationship between theological and secular discourse in Barth's anthropology should, I hope, be clear by now. Barth's thought, including his anthropology, has received extensive criticism elsewhere which does not bear repeating here. However, it is worth raising some possible weaknesses that may well stem from his theological method as this serves to further illuminate the relationship between theological and secular discourse in Barth's thought. Three questions will be posed.

1. *Given Barth's Christological orientation, and the theological ontology that goes with it, is his anthropology adequate?* Two main issues arise. First, Barth is clearly highly dependent upon Christology at almost every point of his theology. However, there is a question about how much we actually know about the person of Christ on the basis of the biblical texts, or at least, the extent to which Barth may or may not move beyond these texts.¹²⁷ Christology may be a good starting point for anthropology, but it is not clear that it should hold the methodological significance that Barth attributes to it without other major (operative) points of reference.¹²⁸ For instance, in his insistence on grounding anthropology on Christology, Barth does not always seem to have done justice to aspects of the New Testament's anthropology,¹²⁹ or even the nature of Christ's humanity within these texts.¹³⁰ Furthermore, his Christology, and certainly the six criteria deriving from it, tend to be fairly abstract. For example, as Jesus assumes fallen humanity, it is not clear at what point he provides criteria for true humanity? However, the main issue I wish to raise lies elsewhere.

The key issue here is not about Christology, but about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Barth has often been criticised for having an insufficient doctrine of the Spirit, which, in this case has some truth to it. Barth consistently maintains that there can be

¹²⁷ Barth's Christology is essentially a highly developed and theologised post-Chalcedonian one.

¹²⁸ It is notable that most contemporary theologians who are indebted to Barth derive their anthropology primarily from the doctrine of the Trinity and not Christology. Examples include, Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1991, esp. Chapter 5; Colin E. Gunton, *The One, The Three, and The Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity. The 1992 Bampton Lectures*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995; Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, Westminster: John Knox Press, 2001.

¹²⁹ See Sykes, 'Barth on the Centre of Theology', pp47f.

¹³⁰ Such as the account given in Udo Schnelle, *The Human Condition: Anthropology in the Teachings of Jesus, Paul, and John*, (trans. O. C. Dean Jr.), Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996.

no direct equation of Christology with anthropology,¹³¹ and furthermore that a direct equation of Christology with anthropology is impossible because of sin.¹³² However, Barth's anthropology rests upon the identification of a correspondence between Jesus' humanity and our own, i.e., that there is something that humanity has in common with Jesus.¹³³ This leads Gibbs to argue that although Christology is Barth's primary point of reference, he also has a secondary point of reference in his anthropology.¹³⁴ Gibbs writes:

The problem posed by the procedure of founding anthropology on Christology is primarily how to distinguish the uniqueness of the Man Jesus from that which all men have in common with Him. This problem is worked out as Barth has recourse, subordinate to the primary Christological point of reference, to a second point of reference – what 'can obviously be said of every other man', or what can be said in a 'general sense' of all other creatures, or what is 'immediately apparent', or the phenomenon as it presents itself to us.¹³⁵

While Gibbs may overstate the case, especially in his identification of the second point of reference in all four main sections of Barth's anthropology, he is right to identify both that there are other implicit criteria functioning within Barth's anthropology that are not stated. Gibbs may also be right about the significance of a phenomenological account of humanity in Barth, but the key that Barth does not develop at this point is the role of the Holy Spirit in anthropology.¹³⁶ In short, does the Holy Spirit not function as the 'secondary point of reference'? Put differently, is

¹³¹ CD III/2, pp47-54; 71; 222; 512.

¹³² Brunner ('The New Barth', pp129f.) suggests that there may be a possible tension here in Barth's thought, because of his view that sin is an ontological impossibility.

¹³³ Cf. Cairns, *The Image of God in Man*, pp169f.. The relationship between Jesus' humanity and ours, albeit not with reference to Barth, is set out extremely well in Stephen W. Sykes, 'The Theology of the Humanity of Christ', in Stephen W. Sykes, and John P. Clayton, *Christ, Faith and History: Cambridge Studies in Christology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972. See also John Thompson, 'The Humanity of God in the Theology of Karl Barth', in *SJT*, 29, 1976, pp249-269; Thomas G. Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh: An Essay on the Humanity of Christ*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993; and Trevor A. Hart, 'Sinlessness and Moral Responsibility: A Problem in Christology', in *SJT*, 48/1, 1995, pp37-54.

¹³⁴ Gibbs, 'A Secondary Point of Reference in Barth's Anthropology', pp132-135.

¹³⁵ Gibbs, 'A Secondary Point of Reference in Barth's Anthropology', p133. References for the citations from Barth have been left out from the quotation.

¹³⁶ The Holy Spirit is important for Barth in his section 'Man as Soul and Body', and increasingly so in Volume IV (esp. §62, §63, §67, §68, §72 and §73) in which he identifies the Spirit as the agent of holiness in sinful humanity amongst other things. However, the Holy Spirit plays a noticeably small role in the core of his anthropology. See Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Chapters 8 and 9.

it not the agency of the Spirit that grounds the correspondence between Jesus' humanity and ours? Perhaps the most important question to raise here is whether or not it is the Spirit's role to transform us into the likeness of Christ in a way that enhances our particularity and not Christ's.¹³⁷ It might well be that the problem Gibbs raises may not have been an issue had Barth a more developed pneumatology at this point. But to return to the main question of this subsection, Barth does offer an adequate anthropology on the basis of Christology and the resulting ontology, but this could be further enhanced with a stronger pneumatology.

2. *Does Barth underestimate the values of non-theological anthropologies?*

John Thompson rightly identifies perhaps the most significant aspect of Barth's anthropology:

Barth has radically reversed traditional dogmatics which began with the phenomenon of the human, with our human being, and then went on to speak of the humanity of Jesus Christ. Barth reverses the order which is consistent with his basic Christological emphasis. In this way the doctrine of humanity is not deduced from but related to and interpreted in the light of the man Jesus Christ.¹³⁸

Barth has, in other words, a very specific orientation which has major methodological implications. There are, therefore, two main options that Barth sees regarding theology's relation to secular discourse. On the one hand, there is the position (which Barth himself holds) which seeks to learn as much as possible as Christians orientated towards God through Christ from disciplines which are not overtly theological. On the other hand, it is possible to try and stand outside the Christian faith to explore other insights and then see where Christian theology matches. There is simply no third way for Barth.

¹³⁷ See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994; and Alisdair I. C. Heron, *The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the Bible in the History of Christian Thought and in Recent Theology*, London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1983, pp137f..

¹³⁸ Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, p168.

Given Barth's Christological orientation, he gives the trinitarian self-revelation of God methodological primacy over secular discourse although he is open to learning as much as possible from secular discourse, but from within a theological frame of reference – secular discourse may function as a servant but not as a master. Stuart McLean puts it this way:

While he [Barth] rejects the findings of social science, used as the source of norms of human nature, he accepts social science when it functions within its limits and when the norm of anthropology is theology.¹³⁹

In short, Barth takes secular discourses very seriously and consequently learns a great deal from them. There may have been scope in his work for greater engagement with them, as T. F. Torrance shows with regard to the natural sciences, but this does not mean that Barth underestimates the value of secular discourse. He does, however, give the trinitarian self-revelation of God methodological primacy at every point.

3. *Is Barth's conception of 'real man' too limited?* Recall that for Barth, 'real man' is Jesus Christ and only secondarily and in an indirect sense is it humanity in general which participates in Jesus Christ. There does seem to be a tension here. On the one hand, real man is defined as one fully and consciously engaged with God in Jesus. On the other hand, humanity in general is defined as linked with God whether or not this is conscious.¹⁴⁰ Emil Brunner puts a different slant on the matter: "I cannot rid myself of the suspicion that 'real man' which is the leading idea of the Barthian anthropology may mean something that is irreconcilable with the Christian doctrine of sin".¹⁴¹ He rightly notices that Barth's use of the word 'real' seems to be what is normally expressed by the word 'true'. In other words, Jesus is true man. But

¹³⁹ McLean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth*, p34.

¹⁴⁰ McLean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth*, p33.

¹⁴¹ Brunner, 'The New Barth', p126.

according to this usage, the sinner is not real man as Barth tells us in a number of places. But Barth also writes of real man in terms of the creature whom God is for. Presumably it is the human creature or humanity in general that is meant here. To use Brunner's words in summary:

At one moment real man is man who fulfils the purpose of God in creation. At another moment real man is man as he in fact exists, i.e. sinful man who as such does indeed not answer yes to God's determination.¹⁴²

I do not intend to resolve this difficulty here other than to point out two methodological weaknesses that may feed into it on the basis of the relationship between theological and secular discourse. First, given the consistency of Barth's Christological concentration it may be that he has not fully taken on board at this stage of his dogmatics, either the implications of sin for human being (not theological method),¹⁴³ nor the contribution that non-theological accounts can offer regarding the phenomena or symptoms of humanity. And second, this tension may again result from an insufficient theology of the Holy Spirit. 'Real' humanity seems to be largely a static notion, whereas humanity formed by the Spirit shaped over time in the whole life, death, and resurrection of the incarnate Son and now formed in us is a radically dynamic notion.¹⁴⁴

5. Conclusion

The central concern of this chapter was to identify the method operative in Karl Barth's theological anthropology as it appears in *Church Dogmatics III/2* with a

¹⁴² Brunner, 'The New Barth', p126. Later he writes: "Either 'real man' means man whom Jesus Christ delivers, man that is who is not doing the will of God, or else this 'real man' is not the man we in fact are" (p130).

¹⁴³ For instance, Williams notes that Barth lacks "any sense of human bondage" ('Barth on the Triune God', p173).

¹⁴⁴ This said, Daniel Price shows Barth's anthropology to be a of a dynamic nature, but this is regarding relations rather than a state (*Karl Barth's Anthropology, passim*).

view to discovering how Barth relates theological and secular discourse. Because of the nature of Barth's theology, the relation between theological and secular discourse only became clear by first identifying some key points of his theological method.

The chapter began by identifying three key emphases of Barth's method as a whole – theology as *Nachdenken*, and a grounding in Christology and trinitarian theology – which were also seen to be operative in his anthropology, even though Christology perhaps received greater emphasis. It was suggested that Barth's most significant contribution to theological anthropology was in his radical reversal of traditional dogmatics which began with the phenomenon of the human and went on to speak of the humanity of Jesus Christ. Instead, Barth reversed the order in accordance with his basic Christological emphasis.

Once Barth's method was clear, the relationship between theological and secular discourse also became clear. Although Barth definitely maintained 'the priority of God' in theological method, he engaged at length with secular discourse albeit mainly through a filter derived from Christological criteria. As a result, he was deeply critical of some non-theological anthropologies, but where he thought secular approaches expounded an anthropology orientated by the Word of God, he embraced them openly.

Three main points could be identified from Barth's engagement with secular discourse. First, regarding the priority of God in theological method, theological anthropology begins with dogmatics, not an *a priori* philosophy, cosmology, or speculative world-view. Second, theological anthropology respects the boundaries between itself and secular discourse as a result of both the form and content being determined by the object. And finally, knowledge of 'real man' or 'true humanity' can only come from the Word of God. Of course, this theological approach is

unlikely to be convincing for secular discourse, but then to try to offer grounds external to the Word of God would be to miss Barth's point. Furthermore, science, much like theology, also has its givens which cannot be established from outside its framework. A dialogue between theology and secular discourse must, for Barth, maintain the boundaries between the different frameworks insofar as the discourse is determined by its object of enquiry. However, as long as the distinctness is maintained, dialogue can occur. It now remains to explore further Barth's method in regard to the doctrine of sin. This appears in his most mature work in *Church Dogmatics* Volume IV and will be explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Method in Karl Barth's Doctrine of Sin

1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to identify the method operative in Karl Barth's hamartiology. Analogous to his anthropology, Barth does not explicitly address the relationship between theological and secular discourse and so this can only become clear in the light of his overall method. As in the previous chapter, Barth's method can only be identified by means of his content. Consequently, the approach adopted will be to engage with the content of Barth's doctrine of sin and identify the key methodological considerations. Only then will the relationship between theological and secular discourse become clear.

The core of Barth's doctrine of sin appears in two main places in his *Church Dogmatics*.¹ First, Barth considers evil or 'das Nichtige' (tr. nothingness), which is located in his doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* III/3.² Although this

¹ There are numerous other places where sin is treated explicitly in one form or another, but not in the same length or depth. Two examples include Barth's discussion of demons in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/3: *The Doctrine of Creation*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, pp519-531; and 'the Lordless Powers' in paragraph 78, Karl Barth, *The Christian Life*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981. John C. McDowell emphasises that Barth only comes to a 'provisional definition' of *das Nichtige* in his discussion in CD III/3, and that this needs to be complemented particularly by the section on 'the Lordless Powers' ("Nothing will come of Nothing": Karl Barth on *das Nichtige*', found at http://www.geocities.com/johnnymcdowell/Barth_Evil.htm [18/4/02]). Similarly, R. Scott Rodin, in his comprehensive book on Barth's doctrine of evil argues that "[a] close examination of the work as a whole [*Church Dogmatics*] will show that in no less than 28 of its 73 sections evil, sin and death are given major treatment" (R. Scott Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy in the Theology of Karl Barth: Issues in Systematic Theology*, New York: Peter Lang, 1997, p5). These he lists as sections 14, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 39, 41, 42, 47, 48, 50, 51, 56, 57, 59, 60, 61, 64, 65, 69, 70, 72, 73, and 78 (p5n). Furthermore, Rodin emphasises that: "This section [on *das Nichtige*], with its very narrow and defined purpose, has mistakenly been treated as the best and final word from Barth on evil. It is instead simply a further exposition on a topic which has been an integral part of his theology from the beginning..." (p181).

² Barth, CD III/3, pp289-368.

section is not explicitly a doctrine of 'sin' (sin is the concrete form of *das Nichtige*), Barth's method is clearly evident here, and perhaps more importantly is highly informative for the relationship between theological and secular discourse. Barth develops an explicit doctrine of sin in his doctrine of reconciliation in *Church Dogmatics* Volume IV.³ What is immediately obvious is that Barth's approach stands in direct contrast to much of the western theological tradition, including the Reformers to whom Barth was heavily indebted, in locating his doctrine here rather than between creation and reconciliation/ redemption.⁴ The key, for Barth, is that knowledge of sin is only possible in the light of the knowledge of the revelation of God and humanity in Jesus Christ.

The structure of this chapter will correspond to Barth's treatment of sin. I will begin therefore by identifying Barth's method as operative in his discussion of evil in III/3 which proves to be particularly illuminating for the relation between theological and secular discourse. Then, I will consider Barth's doctrine of sin in its threefold form of pride, sloth, and falsehood (IV/1-3). This will be located in the wider context of Volume IV and particular notice will be taken of his methodology. Although Barth's method is perhaps at its most developed here, it is only informative for the relation between theological and secular discourse by the total absence of secular discourse which is not insignificant for our purposes. Finally, attention will be directed specifically and critically to the relationship between theological and secular discourse in Barth's doctrine of sin.

³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/1: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/2: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/3.i: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.

⁴ For the Reformers, knowledge of sin was necessary for and prior to understanding the grace of God. The difference between the Reformer's approach and Barth's is set out well in Allen Jorgenson, 'Karl Barth's Christological Treatment of Sin', in *SJT*, 54/4, 2001, pp439-462.

2. *Das Nichtige*

Barth's discussion of *das Nichtige*⁵ is particularly informative for considering the relation between theological and secular discourse, mainly because Barth includes a lengthy footnote (37 pages!) in which he directs attention specifically to secular discourse.⁶ Barth's discussion of *das Nichtige* can be divided into two main sections corresponding to the noetic and the ontic dimensions. As our concerns are mainly with method, particular attention will be paid to the noetic at the expense of the ontic.⁷

Barth opens the section on *das Nichtige* as follows:

There is opposition and resistance to God's world-dominion. There is in world-occurrence an element, indeed an entire sinister system of elements, which is not comprehended by God's providence... nor ruled by the almighty action of God like creaturely occurrence. ... There is amongst the objects of God's providence an alien factor. ... This opposition and resistance, this stubborn element and alien factor, may be provisionally defined as nothingness.⁸

Das Nichtige, the 'impossible possibility', is evil. Evil is nothingness. However, evil is not *defined* as nothingness, rather, evil is *identified* as nothingness.⁹ Nothingness is characterised by its menacing of both God and the creature, and evil is the actualisation of this menace.¹⁰ The concrete form in which *das Nichtige* is active and revealed is sin.¹¹

⁵ To highlight the difficulties of translating *das Nichtige*, I cite the editor's note: "Many terms have been considered for *das Nichtige*, including the Latin *nihil* which has sometimes been favoured. Preferring a native term, and finding constructions like 'the null' too artificial and 'the negative' or 'non-existent' not quite exact, we have finally made do with 'nothingness'. It must be clearly grasped, however, that it is not used in its more common and abstract way, but in the secondary sense, to be filled out from Barth's own definitions and delimitations, of 'that which is not'." (CD III/3, p289).

⁶ CD III/3, pp312-349.

⁷ The somewhat problematic account of the ontic dimensions of *das Nichtige* are addressed in Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Barth on Evil', in *Faith and Philosophy*, 13/4, 1996, pp584-608. Scott Rodin also highlights a number of problematic elements (Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy*, pp200-205). See also John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998, pp70f..

⁸ CD III/3, p289.

⁹ Wolterstorff, 'Barth on Evil', p585.

¹⁰ "Nothingness is the past, the ancient menace, danger and destruction, the ancient non-being which obscured and defaced the divine creation of God but which is consigned to the past in Jesus Christ, in whose death it has received its deserts, being destroyed with this consummation of the positive will of God which is as such the end of his non-willing" (CD III/3, p363).

¹¹ CD III/3, p305.

Das Nichtige poses a number of problems for theology.¹² First, nothingness cannot be explained from the side of the Creator, nor the creature, and yet God is Lord over it and does not permit it. Nothingness is therefore a 'third factor' that neither originates in God nor the creature.¹³ Second, in light of the tension of God's disposal of nothingness and letting it run its course, there is a danger of either overestimating or underestimating its power. Both, Barth suggests, have to be avoided. And third, Barth argues that "theology as a human activity, and under the presuppositions of the present dispensation, knows its object solely under the shadow of this break [between the Creator and the creature]".¹⁴ Therefore, theological thought and reflection must always be broken and can never be integrated into a complete system.¹⁵ Theology's "aim must simply be to make the right report".¹⁶ This last point is significant because as we saw with McFadyen, the form of theology is in large part determined by its content which means that all theology is conducted under the conditions of sin and is therefore of a provisional nature. Although Barth acknowledges this, neither he nor McFadyen seem to allow for the brokenness of theology in practice. Additionally, as we shall see a number of times throughout Barth's hamartiology, he asserts that evil and sin can only be *described* and never *explained*. This is in part an attempt to allow for the brokenness of theology, and yet Barth offers a 'description' of evil and sin to

¹² These problems are addressed more directly in the ontic dimensions of *das Nichtige* which I do not go into (CD III/3, pp349f.).

¹³ In his comprehensive analysis of Barth's doctrine of evil, Scott Rodin comes to two startling (but accurate) conclusions. First, because evil emerges as the eternally rejected 'not-God' from which God has differentiated Himself, its ontology deriving from the non-willed side of God's positive will results in evil being a 'necessary antithesis' in Barth's theology (*Evil and Theodicy*, pp11-14, *passim*). Secondly, there is a sense in which the origin of evil is in God as it is a necessary result of God's choice to create (p77). In this respect Barth is close to Jürgen Moltmann's discussion of *zimzum* and consequently shares some of the same challenges (*God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, Margret Kohl (trans.), London: SCM Press Ltd, 1985, Chapter IV).

¹⁴ CD III/3, p294.

¹⁵ Barth continues: "This does not mean, of course, that we ought not to proceed here and everywhere with the greatest intellectual probity and with rigorous logic and objectivity" (CD III/3, p295).

¹⁶ CD III/3, p295. David Ford rightly emphasises this point in *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics*, New York: Peter Lang, 1985, p102.

the extent that Nicholas Wolterstorff is forced to comment: "in spite of his claim that evil is 'incomprehensible and inexplicable', there is much about evil that Barth professes to comprehend and explain – more than he should".¹⁷

In addition to raising these problems, Barth also addresses a misconception. This misconception is the equation of nothingness with the 'negative' or 'shadow' side of creation.¹⁸ The negative side of creation reminds us of the threat and corruption of nothingness, but is emphatically not to be equated with it. To equate the negative side of creation with nothingness is a slander on creation.¹⁹ There is a contrast and antithesis in creation, and even the negative side praises God even though it is near to nothingness.

The shadow side of creation is one of the most ambiguous and problematic aspects of Barth's theology.²⁰ However, as Jeremy Begbie recognises, "it [is] probable that he is thinking of finitude and all its effects (including death), the quality of having been created out of nothing and therefore always being on the verge of collapsing back into non-existence".²¹ As an illustration of this, Barth offers what amounts to an ode to his beloved W. A. Mozart which Begbie reads as confirmation of authentic praise of a finite, limited creation.²² It is worth noting here, whether or not Barth is right about Mozart, or Begbie about Barth, 'secular discourse' is being

¹⁷ Wolterstorff, 'Barth on Evil', p598.

¹⁸ Barth writes: "creation is as it were on the frontier of nothingness and orientated towards it. Creation is continually confronted by this menace. It is continually reminded that as God's creation it has not only a positive but also a negative side. Yet this negative is not to be identified with nothingness, nor must it be postulated that the latter belongs to the essence of creaturely nature and may somehow be understood and interpreted as a mark of its character and perfection." (CD III/3, p296).

¹⁹ Wolterstorff identifies two problems that arise from Barth's account here. See 'Barth on Evil', pp592-594.

²⁰ See Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy*, pp187-195.

²¹ Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p95.

²² "I make this interposition here, before turning to chaos, because in the music of Mozart... we have clear and convincing proof that it is a slander on creation to charge it with a share in chaos because it includes a Yes and a No, as though oriented to God on one side and nothingness on the other. Mozart causes us to hear that even on the latter side, and therefore in its totality, creation praises its Master and is therefore perfect. Here on the threshold of our problem – and it is no small achievement – Mozart has created order for those who have ears to hear, and he has done it better than any scientific deduction could." (CD III/3, p299n).

used by Barth to illustrate a theological point. The methodological priority here is undoubtedly theology, but at this point, secular discourse is used as an illustration for theology (and not more than this).

If the negative side of creation and nothingness are equated, this is a triumph of nothingness because nothingness would be concealed in the negative and not recognised as nothingness. In this case, "nothingness suddenly becomes something which is ultimately innocuous, and even salutary".²³ Real nothingness, sin, evil, death and the devil would be no less active, just less recognisably so and may even appear to be in positive relation to God. So, how is nothingness known?

To answer this question we must revert to the source of all Christian knowledge, namely, to the knowledge of Jesus Christ... For in Him there is revealed not only the goodness of God's creation in its twofold form [positive and negative], but also the true nothingness which is utterly distinct from both Creator and creation, the adversary with whom no compromise is possible, the negative which is more than the mere complement of an antithetical positive...²⁴

In other words, as with the rest of Barth's theology, nothingness is known through Jesus Christ.²⁵ Nothingness is the enemy that Jesus has defeated and overcome. However, for us nothingness remains the antithesis which we can neither conquer, comprehend, envisage, master, nor control. And again: "We know all this clearly, directly and certainly from the source of all Christian knowledge, the knowledge of Jesus Christ".²⁶ It is only in Jesus Christ that we can see what nothingness is in its true nature and reality.²⁷ In Jesus Christ, we see it as an antithesis

²³ CD III/3, p300.

²⁴ CD III/3, p302.

²⁵ It is worth emphasising again that the Jesus Christ of Barth's Christological method appears to be largely a heavily theologised post-Chalcedonian Jesus.

²⁶ CD III/3, p303.

²⁷ Because of Barth's methodological insistence on describing evil and sin from the perspective of its overcoming in Christ, Barth, in contrast to McFadyen, offers comparatively little discussion of original sin. This is in large part because Barth is not hugely concerned with the origin of sin. See Jorgenson, 'Karl Barth's Christological Treatment of Sin', *passim*; Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy*, pp74f., and Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, p67. In contrast Gary A. Anderson mistakenly writes: "Karl Barth, devoted considerable energy toward recovering what Christian thought meant by the doctrine of original sin" (*Necessarium Adae Peccatum: The Problem of Original Sin*, in Carl E. Braaten, and Robert W. Jenson (eds.), *Sin, Death and the Devil*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000, p38).

not only to God's whole creation but also to the Creator. And so, what is nothingness when seen from this perspective?

Nothingness is the 'reality' on whose account (i.e. against which) God Himself willed to become a creature... yielding and subjecting Himself to it in Jesus Christ in order to overcome it. Nothingness is thus the 'reality' which opposes and resists God, which is itself subjected to and overcome by His opposition and resistance, and which in this twofold determination as the reality that negates and is negated by Him, is totally distinct from Him. The true nothingness is that which brought Jesus Christ to the cross, and that which He defeated there.²⁸

Nothingness is the source, manifestation, and consequence of sin and sin is the concrete form of nothingness.²⁹ However, we cannot come to knowledge of nothingness through knowledge of sin.³⁰ Knowledge of sin and nothingness has its basis in God and God's Word and work, and therefore in Jesus Christ. Just as knowledge of humanity cannot come from knowledge of self for Barth, knowledge of sin cannot derive from humanity's self-communion as it would not be knowledge of real sin or nothingness.³¹ In Jesus Christ we learn that nothingness is not exhausted in sin but exceeds it. Knowledge of nothingness and sin can only be revealed by God and in God's opposition to it. Barth emphasises the significance of this point time and time again:

We must be clear that all our knowledge... of sin can be genuine and related to our own real sin, to true nothingness, only when it is clearly apprehended that sin and nothingness are primarily and properly known in Jesus Christ and acknowledged by Him... Unless Jesus Christ is their objective basis, our knowledge and acknowledgement will bear no real relation to the alien and adversary here involved...³²

²⁸ CD III/3, p305. Wolterstorff comments on Barth's method here: "The fundamental point which Barth wishes to make here is that the negativity which constitutes evil in all its forms can be identified only if God is brought into the picture. Unless we bring God in, we'll miss its nature. There is at work in reality a power, a dynamic, toward the negating of God's purposes and desires, which in turn God negates. Evil is that." (Wolterstorff, 'Barth on Evil', p595).

²⁹ "We have called sin the concrete form of nothingness because in sin it becomes man's own act, achievement and guilt. Yet nothingness is not exhausted in sin." (CD III/3, p310).

³⁰ "We must be careful not to relinquish the position that the objective ground of our knowledge of nothingness is really Jesus Christ Himself. We must be careful not to transfer this ground to the consciousness of our own existence and sin as though this were our direct consciousness of nothingness." (CD III/3, p306).

³¹ In this context 'real' means for Barth "in opposition to the totality of God's creation" (CD III/3, p310).

³² CD III/3, p307.

In terms of method, Barth has remained consistent to his Christological orientation. Knowledge of *das Nichtige* can only come from knowledge of its overcoming in Jesus Christ. Analogous to his anthropology, Barth does not start with a prior concept of evil but derives his understanding of evil from that which God opposes in Jesus Christ. So what place is there for secular discourse in Barth's understanding of *das Nichtige*?

Before focusing on Barth's engagement with secular discourse in the footnote mentioned above, it is worth emphasising again a point that was made in the previous chapter and one that will be made again in following chapters. 'Secular discourse' is not a term that can be applied easily to Barth. Whereas in McFadyen's thought the distinction between theological and non-theological thought was relatively easy to discern, this is not so for Barth. This is because Barth's engagement with secular discourse is usually intertwined with other theological approaches. However, his engagement with other theological approaches and secular discourse are generally used as further resources for development of Barth's point, either in terms of an example of how not to do something, or where he is in agreement by incorporating it into his theology. Put simply, we might be better off examining Barth's thought not in the light of a distinction between theological and secular discourse, but in terms of whether or not human thinking derives from an understanding of the Word of God in Christ. For Barth, the distinction is between the human *logoi* informed by the divine *Logos*, and all other human thought whether or not it is 'theological'. This point will be developed further in Chapter 6 below.

For the purposes of this thesis it is important to maintain the distinction between theological and secular discourse, and so, as in the following analysis, some 'theological' approaches are referred to in general terms as 'secular', which in a sense

they are for Barth. At root, these other theological approaches stand in contrast to Barth's approach – deriving all theology from Christology – and so they are simply unable to identify and describe true nothingness, true sin, and true humanity.

There is, however, another side to the coin. In Barth's thought, 'theology' only exists *because of* the disorder caused by sin. Whereas most secular disciplines could exist in a world that is not fallen, there would be no need for theology in a world that is not fallen. In the opening pages of his *Church Dogmatics* Barth writes: "To set itself in a systematic relationship to other sciences, theology would have to regard its own separate existence as necessary in principle. But this is the very thing it cannot do. It cannot think of itself as a link in an ordered cosmos, but only as a stop-gap in a disordered cosmos".³³ In other words, the very existence of theology itself places it in a necessary relationship with secular discourse. Theology itself is an interruption and therefore adopts a prophetic role in relation to secular discourse. We turn now to Barth's engagement with secular discourse.

The first point to mention is that in this section Barth's engagement with secular discourse is in a footnote. Although some of Barth's most interesting and provoking thought often appears in his footnotes, this suggests at the outset that his engagement with secular discourse is tangential to his theological approach to *das Nichtige*. In other words, Barth is being consistent with his approach to secular discourse insofar as it is generally used in one of two ways, either as an illustration of how not to approach a subject, or to incorporate the benefits into his theological framework. In this case it is largely the former but is nonetheless revealing for his understanding of the relation between theological and secular discourse, that is, Barth's theology remains substantially unchanged by engaging with secular discourse.

³³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995 p10.

It is also worth noting that Barth's discussion of secular discourse in this footnote is a serious, perceptive, and critical engagement with these thinkers. On this basis alone – rigorous engagement with a wide range of secular thinkers – it can be argued that there is a sense in which Barth takes secular discourse more seriously than McFadyen.

Barth considers five main thinkers in this footnote: the theologians Julius Müller and F. D. E. Schleiermacher, and the philosophers G. W. Leibniz, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Our purposes will be served best, not by offering a detailed exposition of Barth's analysis, but by identifying the dominant characteristics that form the basis of Barth's interaction with each respective thinker. In the light of such an analysis, the basis of Barth's engagement with secular discourse will become clear. We will begin with the theologians.³⁴

Barth's main focus up to this point has been with the objective ground of knowledge of nothingness which he locates in Jesus Christ. Julius Müller adopts the opposite approach to Barth,³⁵ which is summarised by Barth: "His apparent rule is that, if we consider human existence in its psychological, sociological and historical reality, a little serious reflection will necessarily lead us to the conclusion that man is a sinner".³⁶ Although Müller's approach is not in accordance with Barth's method, Barth is far from unappreciative of Müller's contribution and writes of Müller:

He was deficient neither in deep and comprehensive insight into human reality nor in scrupulous consideration of earlier thought and opinion. ... [T]he outstanding and enduring significance of his work is that he confronts this dark stain on the psychological, sociological and historical picture of man with greater thoughtfulness, perplexity and alarm, that he investigates and explores this sphere with greater thoroughness, and that he weighs and evaluates the dialectics and limitations of the various ancient and modern theories with greater exactitude, not only than his contemporaries, but also than most of the representatives of the earlier tradition.³⁷

³⁴ This is not the order that Barth adopts. He considers Leibniz before Schleiermacher.

³⁵ Barth's concern is with Müller's two volume *Die Christliche Lehre von der Sünde*, 1838-44 (E.T. *The Christian Doctrine of Sin*, 1885).

³⁶ CD III/3, p313n.

³⁷ CD III/3, p313n.

Barth's problem with Müller is that he does not raise the question of whether this 'dark stain' can be directly perceived, identified and assessed as though it were one phenomenon among others, or whether knowledge of this phenomenon is a question of faith and therefore ('in the strict sense') a theological question. Müller, Barth suggests, assumes the existence of sin as a matter of common knowledge, and therefore, a comprehensive investigation of humanity will reveal a knowledge of the nature of sin and nothingness. Barth finds this approach to be prefigured in Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Pure Reason* and praises the accuracy of both Müller's and Kant's thinking on this subject. However, Barth continues: "The remarkable accuracy of their [Müller's and Kant's] main thesis invites the conjecture that perhaps their only failure is not to see that they actually accept the Christian insight and look from the heart of the Gospel".³⁸ As a result, there are 'serious gaps' in their investigations, three of which Barth highlights.³⁹ At this point it is important to note that Barth is highly appreciative of both Müller's and Kant's thought (although mainly Müller's in this instance), only that insofar as they accurately describe sin and evil, it is not on the empirical basis that they suggest, but is in fact derived from the Gospel albeit without their being aware of it. Because of their attempted method, there are theological deficiencies in their accounts.

Barth's discussion of Schleiermacher is the longest and most comprehensive analysis of all five of the thinkers, which perhaps indicates something of Barth's indebtedness to him.⁴⁰ Rather than entering into the detail here, the gist of Barth's

³⁸ CD III/3, p314n.

³⁹ CD III/3, pp314-316n.

⁴⁰ It is not insignificant that Barth's last ever colloquium in the summer of 1968 was a consideration of nineteenth century theology by means of Schleiermacher's *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. Eberhard Busch highlights the significance of this: "During the summer [of 1968], in a 'postscript' to an anthology of Schleiermacher texts, Barth then gave a survey of the chequered history of his relationship with the great theologian, whom he had first welcomed so enthusiastically and then criticised so vehemently, without being able to get away from him and without solving the questions he

engagement can be obtained by identifying the pattern of his engagement. Recall that with Müller, Barth, first offered an exposition of his thought, drew out some of the strengths, and then pinpointed some of the weaknesses, so with Schleiermacher, Barth first offers an incisive exposition of Schleiermacher. However, rather than simply drawing out the strengths (and there are many for Barth⁴¹) of Schleiermacher's approach, Barth defends him against many of his critics and then adds some of his own criticisms.⁴² What we find in Barth's analysis of Schleiermacher is a deep (albeit critical) appreciation of his work. However, our main concern here is with Barth's engagement with secular discourse, and although Müller's and Schleiermacher's approaches deviate from Barth's, our main interest lies with the philosophers. The theologians are after all deeply imbedded in Christian tradition and, even if their approaches are in opposition to Barth's, we would expect to find much that Barth agrees with because of their being informed by Christian tradition. Is this so with the philosophers, at least one of whom is explicitly atheist⁴³?

Barth's account of Leibniz again begins with an exposition of his thought which is followed by an appreciation and a critique. Leibniz' account of evil was largely from the perspective of the problem of theodicy, hence Barth appreciates the universal scope through which Leibniz interprets sin, evil and nothingness. However, "this is its only praiseworthy characteristic".⁴⁴ The problem that Barth has with Leibniz is, in short, that he subsumes the negative into the positive and lacks a principle for evaluation. As a result, Leibniz domesticates nothingness, and therefore

posed" (*Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1976, pp493-493).

⁴¹ Barth identifies two in particular: that God in his omnipotent grace has negated evil, and that evil exists only in relation to God's grace (*CD III/3*, pp326-328n).

⁴² "The fallacy of Schleiermacher was to absolutise the historico-psychological actuality of the Christian religious consciousness, and therefore to regard the sin apprehended within its limits as real (*CD III/3*, p333n)".

⁴³ However, Barth argues that in many ways neither Heidegger nor Sartre are atheists (*CD III/3*, p343n).

⁴⁴ *CD III/3*, p317n.

does not offer an account of real nothingness. Heidegger and Sartre, whom Barth takes together, are more promising. In the opening paragraph on Heidegger and Sartre Barth writes:

In theology, at least, we must be more far-sighted than to attempt a deliberate co-ordination with temporarily predominant philosophical trends in which we may be caught up, or to allow them to dictate or correct our conceptions. On the other hand, there is every reason why we should consider and as far as possible learn from the typical philosophical thinking of the day.⁴⁵

In other words, in the opening stages of Barth's engagement with two major secular thinkers, Barth affirms first the methodological priority of theology, and second, the importance of engaging with contemporary secular thought. The key appears to be, and this is reading into Barth, identifying which aspects of secular thought (and by extension 'culture') are not merely passing trends or consonant with the framework of the Gospel and are therefore worthy dialogue partners. Unfortunately we are not offered any criteria through which to judge contemporary movements and for two very good reasons. First, to offer criteria for such a task would involve an *a priori* evaluation of the object which is contrary to every bone in Barth's body. Notably, Barth is not even prepared to offer an *a priori* repudiation of natural theology as this would involve succumbing to the very framework against which he is standing. And second, it is often not possible to discern which trends are passing and which have deeper significance until the phenomenon has passed, or at least has existed for some time.

Barth adopts a similar approach for both Heidegger and Sartre – offering a reading of their work, praising aspects of it, and criticising others. Again, we are not concerned with the detail of Barth's exposition so much as to the key question about the extent to which Heidegger and Sartre (and Müller, Leibniz, Schleiermacher – secular discourse) have described 'true' nothingness, or whether they are merely

⁴⁵ CD III/3, p334n.

concerned with the phenomena. The answer is not quite as simple as it would seem. On the one hand, "though Heidegger and Sartre are both in different ways concerned with nothing, they are concerned with something very different from the nothingness which we have here considered as nothingness before God".⁴⁶ And on the other hand, "[t]heir thought is determined in and by real encounter with nothingness".⁴⁷

Herein lies the problem, and it is one which raises our question in a particularly acute manner. Both Heidegger's and Sartre's "thought and expression are determined in and by the considerable upheaval of Western thought and expression occasioned by two world wars".⁴⁸ Both have abandoned the optimism and pessimism, quietism and activism, speculation and positivism of the preceding two centuries. Why? Because both Heidegger and Sartre have faced true nothingness and are formed by this encounter. Hence Barth warns:

Whoever is ignorant of the shock experienced and attested by Heidegger and Sartre is surely incapable of thinking and speaking as a modern man and unable to make himself understood by his contemporaries.⁴⁹

Heidegger and Sartre have both been confronted by true nothingness and are formed by it. Clearly they have captured 'something' of its character albeit without reference to God. To recall Barth's anthropology briefly, secular discourse was able to describe the 'phenomena of man' in some detail, but always fell short of describing 'true humanity'. Are Heidegger and Sartre only concerned with the phenomena of nothingness or with true nothingness? Barth states his opinion very clearly.

[W]e cannot agree that, with their doctrine of nothing, our existentialists have even entered the dimension in which nothingness is to be seen and described as true nothingness by Christian insights. This is naturally of a piece with their ignorance of God, in consequence of which they cannot adopt the standpoint from which one must see and think and speak in this matter. They see and think and speak as true, alert and honest children of our time who have

⁴⁶ CD III/3, p344n.

⁴⁷ CD III/3, p345n.

⁴⁸ CD III/3, p345n.

⁴⁹ CD III/3, p345n.

experienced themselves the shock sustained by modern man. Yet they still resemble Leibniz and Schleiermacher in the fact that they do so from an arbitrary human standpoint...⁵⁰

Heidegger and Sartre are therefore faced with and try to describe true nothingness. Only, because of their adoption of a human standpoint, they are not able to describe true nothingness even though they do capture something of its reality, or rather, the phenomenon of nothingness. Secular discourse can therefore be used as a useful resource for describing the phenomena of nothingness, but to describe true nothingness, a theological approach which sees nothingness from the perspective of its overcoming in Jesus Christ is a necessary requirement.

Barth has clearly gained a lot from his engagement with secular discourse, but in this case he stops short of a 'mutually illuminating dialogue'. Secular discourse is unlikely to benefit hugely from Barth's analysis,⁵¹ and on account of Barth's engagement with secular discourse being in a footnote, his theological approach remains unchanged (although possibly complemented) by his engagement with secular discourse.

In summary, secular discourse can describe accurately the phenomena of nothingness, but falls short of describing true nothingness. This is because secular discourse cannot adopt the Christological standpoint from which true nothingness is revealed. Barth does not argue this out of some kind of attachment to his method, but because he genuinely believes secular accounts to fall short of describing true nothingness. True nothingness – evil and sin – is an explicitly theological reality that can only be described in theological categories. True nothingness is that which

⁵⁰ *CD* III/3, p345n. Or again: "It is futile to deny that what the existentialists encounter and objectively perceive is real nothingness. Yet it must be stated most emphatically that seeing they do not really see. What they see, describe and proclaim is not real nothingness, just as the God, denying or not denying, they ignore and replace by surrogates is not the real God." (*CD* III/3, p346n).

⁵¹ The aim of Wolterstorff's article 'Barth on Evil' is, in part, to challenge philosophers to take heed of Barth's approach.

menaces God and God's creation and therefore cannot be properly described in categories which exclude God.⁵² All forms of secular discourse fail to describe true nothingness because they view it from a human perspective.

Further evaluation of the relation between theological and secular discourse in Barth's discussion of *das Nichtige* continues in Section 4 below. In the meantime we will consider Barth's doctrine of sin, that is, the concrete form of *das Nichtige*.

3. Barth's Doctrine of Sin

The aim of this section is to address specifically Barth's doctrine of sin as it appears in *Church Dogmatics* Volume IV. Although this will not be treated with much reference to the wider material in which it is situated, the methodological significance of this material will become clear in an overview. Consequently, the first sub-section will consider Barth's placement of the doctrine within the context of Volume IV, whilst the subsequent sub-sections will follow Barth's treatment of sin in its threefold form of pride, sloth, and falsehood.

With regard to the relation between theological and secular discourse, it is worth noting at the outset that Barth's account of sin in its threefold form is through-and-through a theological account without so much as a passing reference to secular discourse (not even a footnote!). To a large extent this is to be expected. Whereas many forms of secular discourse offer accounts of evil, sin has generally remained a

⁵² Barth goes on to describe the ontic reality of *das Nichtige* in some length (pp349-368), and although important, would only lead away from our primary concerns. Again I refer readers to Wolterstorff's article 'Barth on Evil' for evaluation of this aspect of Barth's discussion, and again I note that Moltmann shares many of the same problems as Barth here. Moltmann also highlights the ambiguity inherent within 'nothingness' (Moltmann, *God in Creation*, pp72-86). 'Nothingness' is also considered with wider reference well beyond Barth in George S. Hendry, 'Nothing', in *Theology Today*, 39, 1982-3, pp274-289.

theological category and so has not been addressed by secular discourse.⁵³ This does not mean, however, that Barth's account ceases to be informative for the relation between theological and secular discourse. What it does mean is that it is not necessary to enter into the detail of Barth's hamartiology in the way in which this was necessary in his anthropology and, to a lesser extent, his discussion of *das Nichtige*. The heart of his method will become clear by focusing on relevant aspects of his doctrine of sin. We begin by highlighting the doctrine's systematic location.

3.1 Sin in Volume IV

Two main factors help us to locate Barth's doctrine of sin in the wider context of Volume IV, both of which have methodological significance: Barth's location of the doctrine of sin within the doctrine of reconciliation, and the architectonic of Volume IV. These will be taken in their respective order.

1. In contrast to many theological approaches to the doctrine of sin Barth states that, "there can be no place in dogmatics for an autonomous section *De peccator* constructed in a vacuum between the doctrine of creation and that of reconciliation".⁵⁴ Instead, Barth locates the core of his doctrine of sin within the doctrine of reconciliation.⁵⁵ Geoffrey Bromiley lists three reasons for this:

(1) Theology deals primarily with God and obviously one cannot describe the fall as God's work. (2) He has laid the groundwork for the fall in II/2 on election, [and] particularly in the section on nothingness in III/3 [as we have already seen]. (3) He believes that the fall

⁵³ In this regard Alistair McFadyen has rightly argued that even though sin language may appear to be theological, it is in fact 'pragmatically atheism' for many contemporary theologians. Additionally, use of the word 'sin' is especially popular with the press at the moment, but in this case it is neither used as a theological category, nor has it received the explanations which are attributed to 'evil'. 'Sin', in the popular imagination, usually refers to 'something a bit naughty', like eating the extra slice of chocolate cake. Rarely does it carry with it the condemnation that it does (should?) in Christian usage, nor that which evil carries in both Christian and secular use.

⁵⁴ CD IV/1, p141.

⁵⁵ It is worth noting that the German *Versöhnung*, translates both as 'reconciliation' and 'atonement'.

can be properly understood and presented only in the light of the divine work of reconciliation.⁵⁶

The most significant of Bromiley's reasons is the third. In anticipation of later discussion, for Barth knowledge of sin is derived from that which it opposes in Jesus Christ: sin as pride is in opposition to the humiliation of God in Jesus Christ (Very God); sin as sloth is in opposition to the exaltation of humanity in Jesus Christ (Very Man); and sin as falsehood is in opposition to the true witness in Jesus Christ (God-Man). A similar methodology that was operative in his anthropology is evident here. Put negatively,

sin cannot be recognised and understood and defined and judged as sin in accordance with any general idea of man, or any law which is different from the grace of God and its commandment, the law of the covenant.⁵⁷

In other words, sin is not to be defined from pre-theological reflection on human nature and history, rather it is to be defined exclusively out of the event of its overcoming in and through God's act in Jesus Christ. Put positively:

It is in the knowledge of Jesus Christ as the revelation of the grace of God that we shall necessarily perceive step by step both the fact that man is a transgressor, and the nature of the transgression in which he contradicts the grace of God and for the sake of which he is decisively contradicted by that grace.⁵⁸

The two crucial points here are 1) knowledge of sin cannot be derived from any source other than its overcoming in the grace of God (which includes secular discourse), and 2) Christology is again to be the starting point. Both these points will become more evident in an overview of Volume IV as seen from the architectonic to which we now turn.

2. The tight structure of Volume IV helps place Barth's doctrine of sin into its wider context of the doctrine of reconciliation and consequently is informative for the

⁵⁶ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, p175.

⁵⁷ CD IV/1, p140.

⁵⁸ CD IV/1, p142.

content of the doctrine of sin. The section headings of the relevant three part volumes can be formulated in a table as follows:

KARL BARTH'S CHURCH DOGMATICS VOLUME IV

IV/1 <i>Very-God/ Divinity of Christ/ Priesthood</i>	IV/2 <i>Very-Man/ Humanity of Christ/ Kingship</i>	IV/3 <i>God-Man/ Mediator (God-man)/ Prophet</i>
<u>Jesus Christ, The Lord as Servant</u>	<u>Jesus Christ, The Servant as Lord</u>	<u>Jesus Christ, The True Witness</u>
59. The Obedience of the Son of God	64. The Exaltation of the Son of Man	69. The Glory of the Mediator
60. The Pride and Fall of Man	65. The Sloth and the Misery of Man	70. The Falsehood and Condemnation of Man
61. The Justification of Man	66. The Sanctification of Man	71. The Vocation of Man
62. The Holy Spirit and the Gathering of the Christian Community	67. The Holy Spirit and the Upbuilding of the Christian Community	72. The Holy Spirit and the Sending of the Christian Community
63. The Holy Spirit and the Christian Faith	68. The Holy Spirit and Christian Love	73. The Holy Spirit and Christian Hope

From this table it can be seen that Barth's doctrine of reconciliation can be approached either vertically or horizontally. In reading the respective volumes cover to cover, the vertical approach would be adopted. In this case it is evident from the outset that Barth's discussion of sin (sections 60, 65, and 70) is rooted in a Christological account which is expounded at length in the preceding section. Similarly, the subsequent section corresponds to the resulting form of salvation. In other words, moving in the vertical direction takes the following shape:

1. The work of Jesus Christ
2. The form of sin
3. The form of salvation
4. The Holy Spirit and the Christian community
5. Three modes of hope

However, if read in the horizontal direction it is evident that Barth makes use of the traditional 'offices' of Christ (albeit in a different order⁵⁹) as Priest, King, and Prophet, the traditional 'states' of Christ (humiliation, exaltation, and manifestation), as well as the Chalcedonian formulation of the God-human unity.⁶⁰ In each case Barth's reworking of the offices and states of Christ, and the Chalcedonian formula, form the starting point for each successive section which are explicitly developed in the light of the respective Christological orientation. Consequently, in considering Barth's doctrine of sin, we will move horizontally so that the focus can be specific, but at the same time we will bear in mind the broader picture within which Barth's doctrine is situated. Of particular note is the Christological orientation with which each section of the part volumes opens.

The section headings for Barth's doctrine of sin are also informative for method, and can be formulated in a table thus:

THE DOCTRINE OF SIN IN *CHURCH DOGMATICS* VOLUME IV

IV/1	IV/2	IV/3
<u>The Pride and Fall of Man</u>	<u>The Sloth and Misery of Man</u>	<u>The Falsehood and Condemnation of Man</u>
1. The Man of Sin in the Light of the Obedience of the Son 2. The Pride of Man 3. The Fall of Man	1. The Man of Sin in the Light of the Lordship of the Son 2. The Sloth of Man 3. The Misery of Man	1. The True Witness 2. The Falsehood of Man 3. The Condemnation of Man

⁵⁹ Barth explains this as follows: "For me the priestly and kingly offices in the narrower sense are the doings of Christ. The humiliation of God in becoming man and the exaltation of man up to God are respectively Christ's priestly and Christ's kingly work. Christ the prophet is Christ revealing Himself as King and Priest. To make clear what happens when He reveals Himself, I have to know what He is and does... Christ's priestly and kingly offices are the subject-matter, the content of His prophetic office, because He reveals Himself." (John D. Godsey, *Karl Barth's Table Talk*, London & Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962, p17, cited in Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy*, pp207-208).

⁶⁰ See Colin E. Gunton, 'Salvation', in John Webster (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp146ff.

Analogous to the previous table, Barth's doctrine of sin can be read vertically and horizontally. If read vertically, as we shall, the following formulation occurs:

1. Jesus Christ in his respective office and state
2. The antithesis in sin in its threefold form
3. Three corresponding states

In other words, even within the doctrine of sin itself, Barth's Christological orientation determines his understanding of sin. This will be unpacked at length below. We now turn to Barth's doctrine of sin in its threefold form of pride, sloth, and falsehood again focusing particularly on his method.

3.ii Pride

Barth begins his section on pride by noting that his thinking up to this point has assumed the disruption of sin: the previous section in IV/1 dealt with 'the way of the Son of God into the far country', III/3 contained an extensive discussion of *das Nichtige* as we have seen, and the disruptive effects of sin were evident in the doctrine of revelation as far back as I/1. In other words, Barth is aware of the presence, nature, and significance of sin from the outset, but only attempts to clarify the doctrine now. Additionally, most of the Christian tradition including the Reformers tended to explicate sin after the doctrine of creation and before the doctrine of atonement/reconciliation.⁶¹ Implicit in this approach is the view that knowledge of sin is necessary in order to know what salvation redeems. The key here is that knowledge of sin is a prior condition of salvation. Knowledge of sin precedes that of Jesus

⁶¹ Again see Jorgenson, 'Karl Barth's Christological Treatment of Sin'.

Christ.⁶² So why does Barth go against the tradition to which he is so indebted?

Because,

in the knowledge of sin we have to do... with a specific variation of the knowledge of God, of God as He has mediated Himself to man, and therefore of the knowledge of revelation and faith. ... That man is evil, that he is at odds with God and his neighbour, and therefore with himself, is something which he cannot know of himself, by communing with himself, or by conversation with his fellow-men, any more that he can know in this way that he is justified and comforted by God.⁶³

Barth is rigorously applying the same approach that we have already seen in his anthropology. In relation to his anthropology John Webster poses the two alternatives for Barth:

is Christian theology to begin its definition of the human agent from pre-theological reflection on human nature and history, subsequently applying or correlating (perhaps critically) the fruit of such reflections with Christian anthropological and ethical symbols? Or is it to define the human agent exclusively out of the event in which God commands and humanity is called to obedient action?⁶⁴

The issue is one of the relation between the general and the particular. Should we start with a general notion of humanity about which we theologise, or should we derive our understanding of humanity from the Word of God? In relation to sin, should we start by considering a general notion of evil in the world, or is sin an explicitly theological concept that cannot be known from a general idea of humanity? For Barth, the issue is a simple 'either/or', and in both cases he takes the latter option.⁶⁵ Knowledge of self cannot lead to knowledge of sin unless instructed by the Word of God. Barth writes: "Access to the knowledge that he [humanity] is a sinner is lacking in man because he is a sinner".⁶⁶ Or again: "Crooked even in the

⁶² In practical terms, i.e., preaching, the matter may not be quite as clear cut as this would suggest. See Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus is Victor! Karl Barth's Doctrine of Salvation*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1976, pp128f..

⁶³ CD IV/1, pp359-360.

⁶⁴ John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p69.

⁶⁵ Barth's method, anthropology, and doctrine of sin can, on occasions, be seen to intersect. For example: "The term 'mankind' is one which we have to call a Christian term because it is only in the light of the Gospel that we can make serious use of it – to describe the sum of all men to whom the mercy of God is shown because they are all sinful and guilty before Him" (CD IV/1, pp504-505).

⁶⁶ CD IV/1, pp360-361.

knowledge of his crookedness, he can only oppose the Word of God which enlightens and instructs him concerning his crookedness".⁶⁷

Barth spends some time considering whether or not it is possible for there to be an autonomous knowledge of sin apart from and preceding the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and although he concludes that some knowledge is possible (as in Calvin and Luther's use of the Law), it is ultimately insufficient.⁶⁸ The danger of deriving knowledge of sin apart from Jesus Christ, and this would be true for secular accounts as well as theological accounts, Barth suggests, "[is] that the knowledge of human sin against the background of this arbitrary construction will finally prove to be only a dramatised form of the self-knowledge of man left to himself, and that in this confrontation there can be no knowledge of the real sin by which man is accused by God and of which he is guilty before Him".⁶⁹ In contrast to most of the Christian tradition, Barth maintains this 'simple thesis' which falls at the very heart of Barth's methodology: "*only when we know Jesus Christ do we really know that man is the man of sin, and what sin is, and what it means for man*".⁷⁰

This knowledge is a matter of the divine knowledge of revelation and faith. Knowledge of human sin is enclosed in this knowledge and is acquired through this knowledge. There is no other starting point for knowledge of sin and to seek to do so, even in the form of a normative concept by which to measure sin, is itself a form of sin!⁷¹ To try to measure sin or develop a doctrine of sin from the basis of our own resources apart from the grace of God is itself to sin.⁷² Why is this?

⁶⁷ CD IV/1, p361.

⁶⁸ According to Barth, both Calvin and Luther have shown that some knowledge is possible from the law apart from Jesus Christ, however, he identifies six main drawbacks in this position (CD IV/1, pp362-387).

⁶⁹ CD IV/1, p387. There are obviously strong links here to Barth's discussion of *das Nichtige*.

⁷⁰ CD IV/1, p389 (my italics).

⁷¹ CD IV/1, pp141, 389.

⁷² "And is not this necessarily to sin again – theologically!". (CD IV/1, p141).

Not because we can find and produce another and better method, the Christological, but because Jesus Christ Himself is present, living and speaking and attesting and convincing; ... because the man of sin and his existence and nature, his why and whence and whither, are all set before us in Jesus Christ, are all spoken to us directly and clearly and incontrovertibly.⁷³

Knowledge of sin takes place in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. With regard to sin as pride, the obedience of the Son of God functions as a mirror in which we can see the 'man of sin' because in Jesus Christ "we have to do with human sin in its absolutely pure and developed and unequivocal form".⁷⁴ Jesus Christ reveals the reality of human sin in his suffering whilst at the same time being the judge who discloses its sinfulness. In disclosing the sinfulness of sin in its actuality, it is revealed as the truth of all human being and activity. Therefore: "The knowledge of Jesus Christ is finally the knowledge of the significance and extent of sin".⁷⁵

In the light of Jesus Christ, Barth argues, it is clear that there is no human capacity or possibility for overcoming sin, nor the freedom to change from the old to the new. Redemption can only come by the grace of God.

The form of sin that is specifically brought to light by the obedient condescension of the Son is pride. Sin as pride holds something of an overarching character in Barth:

Sin in its unity and totality is always pride. ... Why pride? [Because] [t]he pride of man is a concrete form of what a more general definition rightly calls the disobedience of man and Christianity rightly and more precisely calls the unbelief of man.⁷⁶

In accordance with the tradition Barth sees pride as the prior of the three forms of sin, however, he breaks from the tradition insofar as he understands pride as a 'concrete form' of the disobedience and unbelief of humanity.⁷⁷ It is crucial to note that sin in its threefold form of pride, sloth, and falsehood is first an act of

⁷³ CD IV/1, pp389-390.

⁷⁴ CD IV/1, p397.

⁷⁵ CD IV/1, p407.

⁷⁶ CD IV/1, pp413-414.

⁷⁷ In this respect, Barth avoids the full impact of the feminist critique of the tradition's insistence on pride as the root of all sin which was explored in Chapter 3 below.

disobedience,⁷⁸ which is ultimately rooted in unbelief.⁷⁹ It is unbelief, therefore, and not pride which is the original form and source of all sins. Unbelief, not pride, is the sin which produces and embraces all other sins.

Pride corresponds to and contradicts the divine action in Jesus Christ in which God in his love and freedom becomes a servant. Put differently, pride is the antithesis of its positive counterpart – justification through God's self-humiliation. Barth considers four different standpoints of the human disorder which is the antithesis of the divine order of grace. Before identifying these standpoints, it is important to note that in each case the sin or 'absurd act' which we commit is inexplicable. Sin can and is to be *described*. It cannot, however, be *explained* – it is absurd and irrational. This important point will be seen to recur throughout all of Barth's discussion of sin, and as we shall see below, has significant implications for engaging with secular discourse.

1. "The Word became flesh... [but] we want to be as God is, we want to be God".⁸⁰ As God humbles himself, humanity in sin wants to exalt itself.⁸¹

2. In Jesus Christ "the Lord became a servant... [b]ut the man for whom God is God in this way... is the very opposite – the servant who wants to be lord".⁸² As God the Lord becomes servant, humanity in sin wants to become lord.

3. In Jesus Christ God became "the divine Judge and fulfilled the divine judgement... [b]ut the man whom God meets in this way in Jesus Christ... is the very opposite of all this... wanting to be his own judge instead of allowing that God is in

⁷⁸ "In sin, man does that which God does not will, which, seeing that God is over him and he is the creature and covenant-partner of God, he ought not to do. Sin is the act of man in which he ignores and offends the divine majesty. Sin is, therefore, disobedience." (CD IV/1, p414).

⁷⁹ "Disobedience springs up necessarily and irresistibly from the bitter root of unbelief. It is true enough that unbelief is *the* sin, the original form and source of all sins, and in the last analysis the only sin, because it is the sin which produces and embraces all other sins." (CD IV/1, p414).

⁸⁰ CD IV/1, p418.

⁸¹ Barth's description here goes far beyond what I have described, focusing in each case on how sin in its form as pride is empty and futile, but is also powerful, dangerous, and concealed.

⁸² CD IV/1, p432.

the right against him".⁸³ As God the divine judge fulfils the divine judgement, humanity in sin wants to play the judge.

4. Jesus Christ "gave Himself to the depth of the most utter helplessness... [b]ut the man whose place and kind God made His own in Jesus Christ is... the man who has always thought and still thinks that he can help himself and that in this self-help he has a claim to the help of God".⁸⁴ As God became helpless for our sake, helpless humanity in sin believes that he/she can help him/herself and in doing so can claim God's help.

Now that Barth has considered the antithesis to the humiliation of the Son in the form of sin as pride, Barth examines the fall that results from human pride. In other words, his attention shifts from what the sin of human being is to who and what the human being is who commits this sin.

Barth emphasises that here too, theological enquiry begins with Christology which is normative for all aspects of the doctrine of sin. In the light of Jesus Christ, it can be seen that the man of sin is fallen man. The fall of man comes with the pride of man.⁸⁵ Where the Son of God came down and was raised up, the man of sin tried to exalt him/herself and fell down. Barth makes two preliminary points. First,

we cannot and must not deviate at any cost from the revelation of the Word of God. Just as we cannot see and understand and recognise and confess for ourselves that we have sinned and continue to sin in pride, so we cannot see and understand for ourselves that in so doing we have fallen and that we have to exist incontrovertibly and irrevocably in the depths as servants and slaves and captives.⁸⁶

And second,

however we may describe the fallen being of man, we cannot say that man is fallen completely away from God, in the sense that he is lost to Him or that he has perished.⁸⁷

⁸³ CD IV/1, p445.

⁸⁴ CD IV/1, p458.

⁸⁵ And so the well known proverb 'pride goes before a fall', Barth argues, is true.

⁸⁶ CD IV/1, pp478-479.

⁸⁷ CD IV/1, p480.

In other words, Barth is affirming first the priority of God in theological method, at this point with respect to the doctrine of sin, and second that however great the abyss which separates God and humanity, humanity is still in the sphere of God's action. Barth has already argued that sin can only be described and not explained. In accordance with this principle, he stresses that in speaking of the doctrine of sin we must be careful not to say too little, that is, abandoning the Christological referent from which all theology derives, nor say too much, in which case we would be trespassing in the domain of explanation.⁸⁸

In considering the appearance of humanity which is revealed by the mirror of the obedient humiliation of the Son of God, it is clear first that "only the divine forgiveness is an adequate payment and restitution of the debt of man",⁸⁹ and second, "The fact that Jesus Christ died totally... means decisively that this corruption [of humanity] is both radical and total".⁹⁰ Even though this corruption is total, this does not mean the loss of humanity, nor the loss of the 'good nature', the divine likeness, nor does it mean that 'any relic or core of goodness' remains.⁹¹ What it does mean is that humanity is "corrupt and guilty, [and] the enemy of God".⁹² Consequently: "The only relic that we can speak of is that of God's good and gracious will operative to man and over him – the being of man before God, as the object of His grace even in the form of judgement".⁹³

⁸⁸ There is some question about whether or not Barth does trespass into the domain of explanation as Wolterstorff points out in relation to *das Nichtige* ('Barth on Evil', p598).

⁸⁹ CD IV/1, p484. "To sin is to do that which only God can put right, only God as He acts and reveals Himself as the gracious God (CD IV/1, p491)".

⁹⁰ CD IV/1, p492. Barth continues: "That is to say, it means that the sinful reversal takes place at the basis and centre of the being of man, in his heart; and that the consequent sinful perversion then extends to the whole of his being without exception" (CD IV/1, p492).

⁹¹ See ft. 57 in chapter 4 below.

⁹² CD IV/1, p494.

⁹³ CD IV/1, p494.

In summary, Barth began by explicating the manner in which we become aware of sin through Jesus Christ who judges all human sinfulness as the truth of all human being and activity, and then moved on to consider what sin is as seen from this place in its form as pride. Finally Barth considered the fall that results from human pride, that is, who and what the human being is who commits this sin. In terms of method, in each case Barth's starting point was Christology and each aspect of sin was determined in its antithesis in God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ. In direct contrast to McFadyen, it is notable that Barth has not even made a passing reference to secular discourse at this point. His doctrine of sin is explicitly theological without direct reference to pre- or extra-theological discourse. As Barth's method is now clear in his doctrine of sin and it remains consistent for the next two forms of sin, these can be dealt with more briefly. We continue with the second form of sin.

3.iii Sloth

Barth opens the section on sin in its form as sloth by summarising two key methodological considerations that were laid out in IV/1: that the light from which sin is to be seen is that of its overcoming in Jesus Christ; and that humanity is corrupt even in its self-understanding and in the knowledge of this corruption. Consequently, from the outset Barth remains faithful to his view that genuine knowledge of sin is an element of the knowledge of God, revelation, and faith and proceeds accordingly. That is, Barth consistently maintains yet again the priority of God in theological method.

Barth places the human predicament in contrast with the exaltation of the Son of Man and finds that the human situation is one of immobility and inertia. As a

background to the explication of sin as sloth, Barth finds that in the light of the existence of the man Jesus and the direction of the Holy Spirit, the shaming of all humanity occurs. Shame functions as a criterion of our knowledge of Jesus. Jesus is the one who shames us, and we are those who are shamed by Jesus. Shame arises from comparing ourselves with God. In relation to Jesus in whom we are confronted by a man like ourselves, we are compared to the Holy God against whom our failure is exposed. This is our actual shaming whether or not we see it. If we are ashamed of ourselves, this means that we are aware of the way in which we are shamed by the man Jesus and are forced to see and know ourselves in our loathsomeness.

Sin as seen from the standpoint of the new man in Jesus Christ is sloth. Sloth means for Barth "sluggishness, indolence, slowness, or inertia".⁹⁴ Sloth is the 'evil inaction' which is the antithesis to both the upward movement of the Son of Man, and the form of evil action in pride. There is therefore a contrast between the heroic, Promethean form of sin – pride – and its antithesis in the "quite unheroic and trivial form of sloth".⁹⁵ Barth continues:

The sin of man is not merely desperate but also despairing. It is also... ordinary, mediocre and trivial. The sinner is not merely Prometheus or Lucifer. He is also... a lazybones, a sluggard, a good-for-nothing, a slow coach and a loafer. He does not exist only in an exalted world of evil; he also exists in a very mean and petty world of evil (and there is a remarkable unity and reciprocity between the two in spite of their apparent antithesis).⁹⁶

Sloth, like pride, is a form of general disobedience, unbelief, and ingratitude. Even in its form as inaction, the idler or loafer does something. That is, the loafer does not do that which God wills and consequently does that which God does not will.

⁹⁴ CD IV/2, p403.

⁹⁵ CD IV/2, p403.

⁹⁶ CD IV/2, p404n.

As such, sloth is plainly disobedience and a form of unbelief.⁹⁷ Sin in the form of sloth crystallises in the rejection of the man Jesus, and in resisting God, the slothful man is “turned in upon himself” and finds “his satisfaction and comfort in his own ego”.⁹⁸ The paradox of sin in this form is that in refusing Jesus, the man of sloth not only refuses this man, but also refuses to be himself (“and thus becoming his own pitiful shadow”⁹⁹). Sloth is sin because it is primarily a refusal of God’s grace. Mirroring his structure for his anthropology (CD III/2) and the doctrine of the command of God the Creator (CD III/4), sin in the form of sloth represents humanity’s refusal 1) in its relationship with God, 2) with others, 3) in relation to self, and 4) with time. Each section begins with a brief comparison to the man Jesus, but our main concern at this point is with the human side.¹⁰⁰

1. In relation to God, sin as sloth involves a refusal of God’s gift in our folly and *stupidity*. For Barth, stupidity refers to “that which the Bible describes and condemns as human folly”.¹⁰¹ Therefore, Barth finds that sin in its form as sloth is an evil (in)act(ion) of the whole person, and consequently, the slothful person is responsible and culpable for the refusal to act.

2. In relation to others, sin as sloth involves an inactivity and *inhumanity*. Recalling from Barth’s anthropology that inhumanity means to be without one’s fellows, this again can be understood as a denial of God.

⁹⁷ “He [the idler or loafer] turns his back on God, rolling himself into a ball like a hedgehog with prickly spikes. At every point, as we shall see, this is the strange inactive action of the slothful man.” (CD IV/2, p405). See also CD IV/2, p412.

⁹⁸ CD IV/2, p407. See ft. 49 in Chapter 4 below.

⁹⁹ CD IV/2, p408. There is a strong point of connection with Barth’s anthropology.

¹⁰⁰ In each case Barth shows how each form of sloth that is explored here applies to all four of the relations – God, others, self, and time – and highlights how its is both dangerous and powerful as well as how sloth in these forms is concealed.

¹⁰¹ CD IV/2, p411.

3. In relation to self, sin as sloth involves a life of *dissipation*.¹⁰² In its inactivity, the slothful person is active in willing the disorder, discord, and degeneration of his/her nature.

4. In relation to time, sin as sloth means futile but factual care or *anxiety*: "man is always one who is anxious in some way".¹⁰³ This is rooted the insecurity which derives from being a practical atheist, inhuman, and a vagabond, and occupies both active (frantic activity) and passive (contemplative passivity) forms.¹⁰⁴

Now that Barth has considered the antithesis of the exaltation of the Son in the form of sin as sloth, Barth examines the misery that results from sloth.

In the light of Jesus it is clear, Barth suggests, that humanity's inauthentic existence as those who are 'stupid, inhuman, dissipated, and discontented', is the "misery of man in the sense of his exile as the sum of human woe".¹⁰⁵ The human situation is revealed in the light of Jesus to be one of human misery which is "the evil fruit of the evil sloth of man".¹⁰⁶ However, humanity in its slothful action and misery remains the covenant-partner of God and consequently remains within the sphere of God's action in divine grace. Barth makes three points about the misery which is the consequence of sloth.

1. Since sin as sloth can only be cured by Christ's death, it is itself incurable. Therefore: "Our first proposition is... [that sin as sloth] is a mortal sickness, i.e., that if we ourselves had to bear it... it could end only with our death and destruction."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² "Dissipation involves waste or neglect, and a resultant disorder, discord and degeneration (CD IV/2, p453)".

¹⁰³ CD IV/2, p470.

¹⁰⁴ "[H]e is the dissatisfied man who necessarily becomes his own slave, and lives in the bondage of his need of security (CD IV/2, pp470-471)".

¹⁰⁵ CD IV/2, p483.

¹⁰⁶ CD IV/2, p483.

¹⁰⁷ CD IV/2, p486.

Humanity's misery is a radical perversion, and although not yet death, is plunging to death.

2. Since Jesus, a new man, has taken our place, the misery of humanity belongs to the old humanity. Therefore: "We are freed from our misery to the extent that in Him [Jesus the new man] we too are new men and therefore the subjects of new acts."¹⁰⁸ The misery of man as seen in the light of his liberation is a history in the sense that it has a life of its own in which it continually confirms and renews itself in an endless circle. That is, Barth affirms both that what man does he is, and what he is he does.

3. Since Jesus in royal freedom has set us free from misery, and this is the third proposition: "Our misery... is the determination of our will as *servum arbitrium*".¹⁰⁹ The human will is in bondage. The bondage of the will describes the perversion of the human situation which results from the sloth of humanity in his/her relationship with God, and significantly, can only be established Christologically and not on the basis of any *a priori* reflections or empirical findings. Freedom of the will is not an empty or formal concept, and so picking up some of McFadyen's terminology, it is not a neutral or abstract decision that is to be made between good and evil. Rather the free man is the man who can be genuinely man in fellowship with God.¹¹⁰ That is, freedom to sin is not freedom, rather the only true freedom is in not being able to sin (*non potest peccare*). Or again: "*Non potest non peccare* is what we have to say of the sinful, slothful man. His sin excludes his freedom, just as his

¹⁰⁸ CD IV/2, p490.

¹⁰⁹ CD IV/2, pp493-494.

¹¹⁰ See Colin E. Gunton, 'The Triune God and the Freedom of the Creature', in Stephen W. Sykes, *Karl Barth: Centenary Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; and Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, Chapter 6.

freedom excludes his sin. There is no middle position.”¹¹¹ Freedom can only be found in the new man in Christ. Insofar as the old and the new are present:

Freedom and bondage clash in one and the same man: his freedom as a new man in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit; and his bondage as an old man, outside Jesus...; and both of them total; no *tertium*, no bridge, no mediation or synthesis between them, but only the antithesis of that conflict, life in sanctification, the *militia Christi*.¹¹²

In sum, Barth began by placing the human situation in contrast with the exaltation of the Son of Man and found that the human situation to be one of immobility and inertia. The universality of this form of sin was revealed through shame which forms the background for sin as sloth. Then Barth considered specifically sin in its form as sloth as evil inaction and found that it distorts humanity's relation with God, others, self, and time. In each case sloth was manifested as stupidity, inhumanity, dissipation, and discontent. Finally, Barth considered the misery of human being that is the consequence of sloth.

In terms of method, in each case Barth's starting point remains consistently Christological as each form of sin was determined by its antithesis in God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ. As the Son of Man was exalted, so the man of sin is understood in terms of sloth. Again in direct contrast to McFadyen, Barth has not explicitly referred to secular discourse, and indeed, insofar as he considers theological method here, states that knowledge of sin cannot be derived from empirical findings or *a priori* reflections. As was particularly clear in the brief section on the bondage of the will, this knowledge can only be established Christologically. We turn now more briefly to the third and final form of sin.¹¹³

¹¹¹ CD IV/2, p495.

¹¹² CD IV/2, p497. Cf. Barth's discussion of human being as *simul totus iustus et totus peccator* (CD IV/1, pp517; 596; 602) which is explored in Trevor A. Hart, *Regarding Karl Barth: Towards a Reading of His Theology*, Downers Grove: IVP, 1999, Chapter 3, and also Chapter 7 below.

¹¹³ I treat this section more briefly not only because Barth's method is already clear and so it would be of limited value to engage in a lengthy exposition here, but also because I echo Colin Gunton's sentiment that Volume IV/3 "cannot be said to add much to Barth's understanding of salvation [or sin]" (Gunton, 'Salvation', p151).

3.iv Falsehood

Barth reiterates again that knowledge of sin “derives subsequently and retrospectively from a knowledge of the existence and work of Jesus Christ as the Mediator of the covenant of grace”.¹¹⁴ In being unreservedly faithful to his method, Barth finds the contrast to Christ as the true witness in sin in its form as falsehood or untruth. Falsehood is the opposition of humanity’s own word to God’s Word and is thus an evasion and obstruction to the reality of God. Falsehood therefore adds a third dimension to sin in its forms of pride and sloth.

Although pride does hold an overarching character for Barth, a number of commentators have missed the significance of falsehood.¹¹⁵ Falsehood is something of a common denominator for pride and sloth because humanity stands in a false relation to the truth in pride and sloth. But falsehood is also distinct from the first two forms of sin in that pride and sloth can be understood as the works of sin, and falsehood as the word of sinful humanity. Even though the truth is revealed to humanity in Jesus Christ, it is rejected and untruth is asserted against it. Man is therefore shown to be a liar.

What, then, is truth? Truth is not an idea, principle, system, or even correct doctrine.¹¹⁶ Rather, “the truth of God is grounded in the fact that this is identical with the true Witness Jesus Christ as the revelation of God’s will and work for man enacted in Him”.¹¹⁷ Barth outlines three ways in which Jesus is the true witness.

¹¹⁴ *CD IV/3.i*, p369.

¹¹⁵ One example of this can be seen in an otherwise highly informative paper: Kathryn Greene-McCreight, ‘Gender, Sin and Grace: Feminist Theologies Meet Karl Barth’s Hamartiology’, *SJT*, 50/4, 1997, pp415-432.

¹¹⁶ “Even at best, doctrine as the work of man is always a dubious and equivocal phenomenon (*CD IV/3.i*, p376)”.

¹¹⁷ *CD IV/3.i*, p377. It is worth noting that Barth emphasises both the historicity of Jesus and his empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

First, Jesus exists in relationship to God in a unique way which distinguishes him from the rest of humanity, and yet stands on equal footing with humanity. Because of Jesus' twofold determination – the vertical and horizontal relations, true God and true man – Jesus is the one who is the true witness. Second, Jesus is the true witness as the suffering Jesus. The prophetic work of Jesus takes the form of passion. It is through the victory in his sufferings that Jesus pursues his prophetic task and witnesses to the truth of God's suffering with us in him. Third, as the true witness, Jesus is a speaking person in whom the truth is present and speaks by itself. He speaks from the place that God alone has the power to speak, and speaks of the reconciliation of the world to God effected in his death and passion.¹¹⁸

Barth turns from the truth to which testimony is borne in Jesus Christ to its opposite in sin as falsehood in the man of sin. Falsehood, is primarily a spiritual (not moral) phenomenon and consists in a movement of evasion. Evasion refers to the attempt to find a place where truth can no longer reach or affect humanity. One way in which this is done is in apparent espousal of the truth, whereas in fact humanity espouses untruth.¹¹⁹ It is clear therefore that differentiation is needed between truth and untruth and, for Barth, Jesus Christ functions as the criterion for this differentiation. Barth identifies four main points where falsehood is revealed. First, the man of untruth avoids identifying Jesus Christ with the truth. Second, the man of untruth further fails to recognise the truth in the death and passion of Jesus Christ.

¹¹⁸ Significantly, God's Word is not dependent upon its being heard. There is no natural human capacity for the hearing of God's Word (no 'point of contact'), and so, if it is heard it is on account of the agency of the Holy Spirit.

¹¹⁹ With characteristic wit, Barth offers a number of examples: "He sets up a theoretical and practical system of truth. He establishes fronts on behalf of truth. He founds schools and academies of truth. He celebrates days and even whole weeks of truth. He organises formal campaigns for truth. He is so active in the cause of truth that when compared with him Jesus Christ the true Witness seems to be only a waif and a bungler who must surely be glad that He has found a patron and advocate to support Him so skilfully and powerfully." (*CD IV/3.i*, p436).

Third, the man of untruth avoids God's Word of grace and pardon which is spoken in the power of the Holy Spirit which demands obedience and gratitude. Fourth, the man of untruth avoids God's free Word that endows him with the true freedom of a free cleaving to the free God.

Falsehood is not simply identical with the untruth active in all forms of human unbelief, superstition and error. Although these phenomena are manifestations of the falsehood of the man of sin, this judgement is only possible in the light of the witness of Jesus Christ and therefore stand in his light.

Sin in its form as falsehood carries with it the threat of condemnation because of the threat of the sinner being nailed to his/her lie. Humanity refuses the Word of truth, the pardon that comes with it, and attempts to change the truth into untruth. In treating the truth as untruth, the man of sin stands under the threat and danger of being damned. The prospect of condemnation is his/her future, and although there is still time to repent, this does not mean that damnation will not happen.

In summary, Barth's discussion of sin in its form as falsehood, although only outlined briefly here, can be seen to echo closely the structure of sin in its previous two forms. That is, Barth began by focusing on Jesus the true witness in the light of whom his antithesis – the man of sin in its form as falsehood – became clear. Again at every point, Jesus functions as the criterion for identifying, understanding, and describing sin (notably not explaining it). As in the previous three forms, sin in its form of falsehood can be seen to carry with it the threat of condemnation.

With regard to our concern with the relation between theological and secular discourse, Barth's hamartiology proper is conspicuously silent. He has not made use

of secular discourse at any point of his discussion, even in his footnotes. However, we can discern Barth's attitude towards secular discourse in relation to sin by extension from his method as we will see in the next section.

4. Secular Discourse in Barth's Doctrine of Sin

In this section I will review briefly Barth's theological method as evident in both his understanding of *das Nichtige* and his doctrine of sin. Then I will consider more specifically the relation between theological and secular discourse in both of these main sections, and finally, evaluate Barth's approach more critically.

4.i Method in Barth's Hamartiology

In the opening section of the previous chapter three methodological loci were identified as operative in the whole of Barth's thought: theology as *Nachdenken*, a grounding in God as Trinity, and a starting point in Christology. All three of these loci were clearly evident in Barth's anthropology. With regard to Barth's hamartiology, the trinitarian grounding is not obvious (although it is implicit especially in relation to his Christology) and it is evident in Volumes III and IV as a whole.¹²⁰ However, Barth's hamartiology was clearly grounded in his Christology at every point. Analogous to his anthropology, Barth did not operate with a prior or general concept of evil from which an understanding of sin was derived, rather his doctrines of *das Nichtige* and sin were explicitly developed in the light of their being

¹²⁰ This is clear from the account of Volume III offered in Kathryn Tanner, 'Creation and Providence', in John Webster (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; and Volume IV offered in Gunton, 'Salvation'.

overcome in Jesus Christ. And so, the starting point for Barth's hamartiology as well as his anthropology is undoubtedly Christology.

Again in unison with his anthropology, Barth's hamartiology takes the form of *Nachdenken*. It has been highlighted in both Barth's anthropology and hamartiology that theological method can be simplified to an 'either/or'. That is, theology proceeds either by operating with prior concepts of humanity and sin, or derives these doctrines from an understanding of who God is in Christ. The whole of Barth's thought, including his anthropology and hamartiology, takes the latter option. Theology is an *a posteriori* activity. In relation to *das Nichtige* and sin, both can only be known in the light of their overcoming in Jesus Christ and cannot be derived from any other source including secular discourse. The pressure of interpretation moves from knowledge of Christ's redemptive work to sin and emphatically not the reverse. Knowledge of sin is, in other words, a variation of knowledge of God.

4.ii Secular Discourse in Barth's Hamartiology

In many ways Barth's doctrines of *das Nichtige* and sin are not as informative for considering the relation between theological and secular discourse as his anthropology was. However, this is not to say that there is nothing to be gained from it. Barth's discussion of *das Nichtige*, in which he engages explicitly with secular discourse in a lengthy footnote, is highly informative. Consequently, we will begin by focusing on Barth's interaction with secular discourse in this section, and then consider his lack of engagement with it in relation to his doctrine of sin. Although there is no explicit engagement with secular discourse in his doctrine of sin, his method is possibly at its most developed here and so is instructive for theological

method, and furthermore, offers a wealth of material for a *theological* concept of sin. In both cases the key question to be asked is the extent to which secular discourse can describe 'true' nothingness and sin, or whether they are only concerned with the phenomena.

1. *Secular discourse in das Nichtige.* Barth offers a theological account of *das Nichtige* which demonstrates a strong awareness of secular accounts of nothingness, but is not informed by them. In other words, Barth's account is an explicitly theological account that derives from theological criteria and a theological method – describing *das Nichtige* in the light of its overcoming in Jesus Christ. To this extent, secular discourse does not adopt an informative role in Barth's account. However, in a lengthy footnote Barth engages explicitly with secular accounts (by which I include Müller and Schleiermacher at this point) of evil, all of which adopt a starting point from a human or non-theological perspective. In each case Barth finds much that is to be praised as well as much that he criticises. In short, secular discourse can describe the phenomena of nothingness but not true nothingness.

Barth's engagement with secular discourse does appear to be more than a passing interest and he does show considerable vigour in his reading of the particular figures. As a result, Barth certainly takes secular discourse seriously, arguably more so than McFadyen, but he does not enter into dialogue with it at this point (which McFadyen does). Barth's theology neither informs secular discourse, nor is it informed by secular discourse. The fact that Barth's engagement with secular discourse occurs in a footnote shows both that he takes it seriously, and also that it is tangential to his overall argument. However, one is not left with the view that it is merely tangential, rather that if it warranted incorporating explicitly into his argument

he would have done so. The key, for Barth, lies in giving theology ultimate methodological primacy and if need be allowing secular discourse operative primacy.

A strong case can be made for secular discourse not entering his argument proper because of his reluctance to enter too deeply into describing the phenomena of nothingness. In this regard Barth comments: "The pathology of the man of sin is not part of the true subject-matter of dogmatics".¹²¹ There is no doubt in my mind that if Barth was concerned to describe the phenomena of *das Nichtige*, much like he described the phenomena of man in his anthropology, he would draw heavily from secular discourse particularly Müller, Heidegger, and Sartre. However, the more interesting question to be asked at this point is about the potential of Barth's discussion of *das Nichtige* for the relation between theology and secular discourse now.

Nicholas Wolterstorff's article on Barth and *das Nichtige* highlights two significant points for our discussion.¹²² Wolterstorff, writing as a philosopher albeit a Christian one, uses Barth's doctrine to challenge some contemporary philosophical approaches to evil, and at the same time identifies some problematic elements in Barth's account of the ontic dimensions of *das Nichtige*. In other words, we find in Wolterstorff an attempt to bring Barth's discussion of *das Nichtige* into dialogue with secular thought in such a way that the dialogue is mutually illuminating for both partners. In particular, Wolterstorff finds a number of aspects of Barth's account of *das Nichtige* particularly fruitful for challenging contemporary philosophical approaches. These can be summarised thus: insisting that evil is a power, finding negative aspects in creation that are not evil, arguing that evil cannot be identified by reference to the negative aspects, and perhaps most importantly recognising that God

¹²¹ CD IV/3.i, p469.

¹²² Wolterstorff, 'Barth on Evil'. McDowell's article 'Nothing will come of Nothing' might also serve as an example of an approach which bridges the gap between theology and secular discourse.

is wounded by much that transpires in creation. On the other hand, aspects of Barth's argument, especially regarding the ontic dimension of *das Nichtige*, are shown to be problematic for the contemporary philosophical mind. This might suggest that had Barth engaged more explicitly with some philosophical approaches to theodicy, he might have revised some of the tensions in his account of the ontology of *das Nichtige*. This, however, is to enter into speculation.

2. *Secular discourse in Barth's doctrine of sin.* Barth did not attempt to engage explicitly with secular discourse at any point of his doctrine of sin. As first glance this does not bode well for our concerns. However, on a number of occasions Barth does state that sin cannot be recognised, understood, defined, and judged as sin in accordance with any general (or *a priori*) principle or notion of humanity apart from the grace of God. In other words, there are no resources whether theological or secular that can identify sin as sin that are not derived explicitly from the Word of God. As we have already seen in Barth's discussion of *das Nichtige*, he is not opposed to engaging with secular discourse *per se* or even incorporating secular discourse into his theological approach, rather, Barth believes that secular discourse cannot describe true sin because it attempts to view sin by excluding reference to God. This point is clear in the Harnack/ Barth correspondence of 1923:

Harnack. Sin may be defined as a lack of respect and love.

Barth. Sin is rather more serious than mere lack of respect and love. In is enmity with God and estrangement from God. It is our being lost in an alienated and superficial likeness to God. It is a condition which can only end in our annihilation. ...¹²³

John Webster captures Barth's position well when he writes: "Barth's Christological determination of sin is not so much an attempt to dislocate

¹²³ Point 12 of the Harnack/ Barth Correspondence: 'On sin in relation to the form and content of preaching' cited in George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000, p329.

'theological' from 'empirical' reality, as an argument born of a sense that human persons are characteristically self-deceived".¹²⁴ Webster has recognised that Barth's concern is not to distinguish between theological and secular discourse, as all forms of human thinking and activity are inherently flawed (which for theology means that reflection must always be broken and can never be integrated into a complete system). Rather, Barth's concern is with the extent to which all human thinking is conformed to the Word of God. It is for this reason that the distinction between theological and secular discourse is not always appropriate for Barth. There is also reason to believe that although Barth does not discuss secular discourse in his doctrine of sin, he thinks that some knowledge is possible. In part this can be argued by comparison with his discussion of Heidegger and Sartre in his section on *das Nichtige*, but there is also evidence for this in his doctrine of sin.

Although this was not discussed at length, it was noted that Barth spends some time considering whether or not it is possible for there to be an autonomous knowledge of sin apart from and preceding the knowledge of Jesus Christ. In particular, Barth was concerned with Calvin and Luther's use of the Law. He concluded that some knowledge is possible but that it is ultimately insufficient. By extension, it can be suggested that secular discourse might offer some knowledge of sin, especially the phenomena of sin, but that this too is insufficient. Why is it insufficient? Because sin is an irreducibly theological concept and reality which is at root a form of disobedience and unbelief.

In terms of method we again find that there are only two possible approaches to knowledge of sin. On the one hand, knowledge of sin can be derived from a general concept of humanity, evil, or even empirical method, on the other hand

¹²⁴ Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, p69.

knowledge of sin can only be derived from the Word of God.¹²⁵ The methodological choice is a simple 'either/or'. Echoing his anthropology and his discussion of *das Nichtige*, Barth finds all theories to be ultimately deficient that are not derived explicitly from the Word of God. Why? Because they are only concerned with the phenomena of humanity or sin, not true humanity or true sin.

Another approach to the relation between theological and secular discourse in Barth's doctrine of sin can be found in Barth's insistence that sin can only be described and not explained. Even whilst bearing in mind Wolterstorff's comment that Barth does not maintain this distinction consistently, a case can be made that insofar as secular discourse addresses sin, it tends to try and explain sin (perhaps Norman Bates in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* represents the case in point). This is especially clear in the social sciences where complex pathological histories are often seen to explain almost in a causal sense why a person commits a specific evil act.¹²⁶ By way of contrast, for Barth, sin is an 'absurd act', the 'impossible possibility' which we cannot ultimately explain. Sin can only be described – it is irrational.

Further ramifications of Barth's hamartiology for the relation between theological and secular discourse will be discussed in the following chapter where Barth's thought will be drawn into explicit dialogue with McFadyen's. It will be argued that although Barth's basic theological method is correct with regard to sin, he

¹²⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg adopts the first approach and on this basis criticises Barth's doctrine of sin. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, (trans.) Matthew J. O'Connell, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1985, Chapter 3, and pp91-92 for his critique of Barth.

¹²⁶ This can be seen time and time again in contemporary films, many of which tend to be about sin in one form or another. One recent example can be seen in the film *From Hell* which is about Jack the Ripper. Before seeing the film I was curious about how Hollywood would deal with the fact that these particularly gruesome and apparently random (and therefore inexplicable) murders were left unsolved (in 'real life'). The answer is by constructing an 'X-Files' type plot which reaches to the highest levels of society. In other words, Jack the Ripper's evil is, from within a certain framework, made to appear perfectly logical (cf. *Seven*). The message is clear. Evil is not so bad if it is clearly explicable and has been rationalised. For film this means making us uncomfortable enough for us to sit up in our seats, but not so uncomfortable that we cannot revel in the gore knowing that it will ultimately be resolved. I suggest that film in this instance illustrates a popular approach to evil within secular discourse particularly in the social sciences. See also Reinhold Zwick, 'The Problem of Evil in Contemporary Film', in John R. May (ed.), *New Image of Religious Film*, Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997.

applies it too rigidly with reference to secular discourse. In the meantime we consider some further ramifications of Barth's doctrine of sin.

4.iii Further Consideration of Barth's Doctrine of Sin

In the previous chapter three possible weaknesses in Barth's anthropology were considered which helped clarify his understanding of the relation between theological and secular discourse. However, a similar approach to Barth's hamartiology would not be of great benefit here, not because there are no weaknesses, but because Barth does not engage with secular discourse in his hamartiology to the extent that he did in his anthropology. Therefore a different approach will be adopted.

Barth's method in both his doctrines of *das Nichtige* and sin are now clear. It has been argued that Barth takes secular discourse more seriously than McFadyen but that he does not enter into dialogue with it. This was particularly clear in Barth's discussion of *das Nichtige*. Barth's doctrine of sin was less useful in large part because secular discourse does not tend to address sin since 'sin' is a theological term with limited value for secular approaches. However, there are non-theological equivalents to sin which capture in essence what theologians call sin (Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud might serve as examples). Again it is not Barth's concern to attempt this task either, but we might ask whether Barth's thought can be brought into dialogue with such an approach and indeed this has been done in an aptly titled book, *The Dialogue between Theology and Psychology*.¹²⁷ One essay in particular is of relevance here which we will consider briefly.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Peter Homans (ed.), *The Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology: Essays in Divinity, Volume III*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

¹²⁸ Fred Berthold Jr., 'Theology and Self-Understanding: The Christian Model of Man as a Sinner', in Homans, *The Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology*, Chapter 1, pp11-32.

In his essay 'Theology and Self-understanding: The Christian Model of Man as a Sinner', Fred Berthold Jr. considers whether or not analysis of human experience yields theological insight, or whether theological insight yields an understanding of experience. To do this he adopts two models of human sin which he places into dialogue, the first being Barth's doctrine of sin,¹²⁹ the second being a psychoanalytic approach to narcissism. Berthold's aim is close to McFadyen's: "to inquire whether the Christian theological model of 'man as sinner' is adequate to, or in conformity with, the facts of human experience".¹³⁰ In other words, Berthold attempts to see whether Barth's account of sin holds 'explanatory and descriptive power' (McFadyen) for human experience. Because of the similarities here with McFadyen's (considerably better) approach to sin and the inadequacies of Berthold's, the detail is not important. Rather Berthold represents the admirable aim of placing Barth's thought into a situation of 'testing' whereby theology is brought into dialogue with secular discourse. In the light of this dialogue, Berthold suggests that "the data as understood psychoanalytically should lead us both to expand and to revise the theological model".¹³¹ This is not surprising given Berthold's 'straw-man' Barth, but he does alert us to a way in which theology can engage with secular discourse. For both Berthold and McFadyen, the dialogue between theology and secular discourse should be mutually illuminating, and both ultimately adopt the 'priority of God in

¹²⁹ Although Berthold's essay is useful, his treatment of Barth's doctrine of sin is grossly inadequate. As a result he comes to some false conclusions. Two examples will suffice. First, Berthold conceives of Barth's doctrine of sin solely in terms of pride at the expense of sloth, falsehood, disobedience, and evil. Second, even though Berthold does make passing reference to the link between pride and unbelief, he uses Barth as a representative of the western tradition in terms of pride being the root sin. Both of these factors mean that Berthold fails to recognise the depth and nuances in Barth's doctrine of sin, and ultimately describes a 'straw-man' version of Barth. One false conclusion that Berthold is led to is that the psychoanalytic approach criticises the Protestant doctrine of sin along the same lines as the feminist critique that was highlighted in McFadyen's work in Chapter 3 below. As we saw, this critique has a limited impact on Barth because he already offers an account that incorporates most of the criticisms – sin as unbelief, disobedience, and sloth. I suspect that there may be similar problems in his account of psychoanalysis but I am not in a position to highlight them.

¹³⁰ Berthold, 'Theology and Self-Understanding', p15.

¹³¹ Berthold, 'Theology and Self-Understanding', p29.

theological method' which we have now seen extensively in Barth's thought. Additionally, Berthold identifies an important way in which Barth's account of sin can both inform and be informed by secular discourse even if secular approaches do not recognise this as sin.

Berthold also alerts us to a danger with entering theology into dialogue with secular discourse – a danger which we have also seen in McFadyen albeit to a lesser extent. The danger lies in being unfair to either the theological side or the non-theological side. Berthold's treatment of Barth's (and Calvin's and Luther's) doctrine of sin was simply not fair to them. Whereas McFadyen's account of secular discourse, less so in his later work, does not account sufficiently for the range of secular discourse. In other words, there is a crucial lesson to be learned here: *if this kind of dialogical approach to theology is to be attempted, it is important that secular discourse and theology should be taken seriously by attempting to understand the other's position on its own terms, and treating the material fairly.* Even though Barth is not concerned to enter into a dialogue with secular discourse, his theology is highly instructive at this point. Whether or not he agrees with a particular thinker, he always treats them seriously and fairly, as well as acknowledging explicitly the range of positions.

5. Conclusion

The central concern of this chapter was to identify the method operative in Karl Barth's hamartiology as it appears in *Church Dogmatics III/3* and *IV/1-3* with a view to discovering how Barth understands the relationship between theological and secular discourse. As in the previous chapter, Barth's understanding of the relation between theological and secular discourse only became clear by first identifying his

theological method. In this case, the analysis of Barth was perhaps less fruitful than his anthropology for shedding light on the relation between theological and secular discourse although it was by no means worthless.

The key, for Barth, is that knowledge of sin and evil is only possible in the light of the knowledge of the revelation of God and humanity in Jesus Christ. Possibly the greatest achievement of Barth's hamartiology lies in his theological approach to knowledge of sin and evil in the light of its overcoming. In this way Barth stands in contrast to much of the Western tradition including the Reformers who typically located the doctrine of sin between creation and redemption rather than within the doctrine of reconciliation. The consequence of Barth's shift was that there is only a very limited possibility of knowledge of sin from a perspective other than its overcoming in Jesus Christ. Barth's approach here fits well with his basic Christological orientation and approach to theology as *Nachdenken*.

In the light of Barth's basic method, his understanding of the relationship between theological and secular discourse also became clear. With regard to *das Nichtige* Barth engaged explicitly with secular discourse in such a way that he took it seriously, possibly more so than McFadyen, but did not enter into a dialogue with it. As a result, Barth maintained the priority of God in theological method and engaged with secular discourse. Even though Barth did enter into dialogue with secular discourse in his anthropology and did not here, it was suggested that he would have been prepared to give secular discourse operative control had it be required by his theology. Furthermore, it was argued that the reason Barth did not need to dialogue with secular discourse here was that he was not concerned to describe the phenomena of sinful humanity in much depth.

With regard to his doctrine of sin, Barth did not explicitly engage with secular discourse at all and so there was a more limited sense in which his doctrine of sin was informative. Again it is worth emphasising that a major reason for this is that 'sin' is not a secular term, and therefore we should expect limited engagement with it. However, it was argued that if Barth was concerned to describe the phenomena of sin he might well have entered into dialogue with secular discourse, and more importantly, that secular discourse could not accurately describe true sin. The reason for this was twofold. First, secular discourse could not recognise sin as sin because reference to God was excluded. And second, because secular discourse was itself corrupted by sin it is trapped in its own circle.

The previous chapter concluded by identifying three main points from Barth's engagement with secular discourse. First, theological anthropology consistently maintained the ultimate priority of God in theological method and does not begin with an *a priori* philosophy, cosmology, or speculative world-view. Second, theological anthropology respects the boundaries between itself and secular discourse as a result of both the form and content being determined by the object. And finally, knowledge of 'real man' or 'true humanity' can only come from the Word of God. With regard to Barth's hamartiology the first and third points are again confirmed. In his limited engagement with secular discourse, theology consistently maintains ultimate priority. Similarly, knowledge of true sin and evil can only come from knowledge of the Word of God. The second point is not so much of an issue for Barth's hamartiology, in part because the distinction between theology and secular discourse may not be the most appropriate one for Barth especially at this point – an issue which will be explored further in the following chapter. A better one might be to distinguish between human thought that is determined by the Word of God and human thought that is not.

However, because there is sufficient overlap between the two, investigating Barth in light of the distinction between theology and secular discourse is still worthwhile and will be explored at greater length in the following chapter.

Having explored in some detail Barth's understanding of the relation between theology and secular discourse in his anthropology and hamartiology, it now remains to bring Barth into explicit dialogue with McFadyen. This is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

Learning From McFadyen and Barth

1. Introduction

The central question lying at the heart of the thesis is 'how ought theology to be done?'. In response it has been argued that theological enquiry ('straight dogmatics') has two main aspects which are to be understood as part of a single task. The first aspect is to reflect critically on the trinitarian self-revelation of God as testified to in the Christian scriptures, doctrine, tradition and history. The second aspect is to engage critically with the social, cultural, and intellectual world in which we are living. From this understanding of theology it follows that it is crucial for theology to engage with secular discourse. The specific concern of the thesis has been to identify how theology should engage with secular discourse.

In Chapter 1 above, Types 3 and 4 of Hans Frei's typology were set out as the polar positions of the thesis. Type 3 gives equal weight to Christian self-description and philosophical frameworks. It proceeds by way of a 'correlation' between the Christian faith and other disciplines with the aim of developing a 'dialogue'. By way of contrast Type 4 gives priority to Christian self-description. The pressure of interpretation moves from theology to other disciplines. It recognises that other disciplines can make important and significant contributions to the Christian faith, but that theology retains ultimate priority. David Ford and John Webster's approaches were used as representatives of Types 3 and 4 in Chapter 1. It was then suggested that Alistair McFadyen's approach falls between Types 3 and 4, and further, that this is

how theology should engage with secular discourse. Karl Barth, whose thought falls in Type 4, was used as a conversation partner. A dialogue with a Type 4 thinker was considered more valuable than with a Type 3 thinker because of the necessity of giving God's self-revelation ultimate priority over secular discourse. In this respect Karl Barth's thought serves as a useful check.

Having explored McFadyen's and Barth's thought at length in Chapters 2-5 above, it now remains to bring their approaches together in 'dialogue' and draw some conclusions about how to structure the relation between theology and secular discourse. In particular, it will be argued that McFadyen's thought lies in direct continuity with Barth's, but that he takes Barth's basic premises further in terms of dialogue with secular discourse. However, although McFadyen enters into a more open dialogue with secular discourse and gives it greater weight in shaping his theology than Barth, Barth takes secular discourse more seriously than McFadyen.

Three main tasks remain which correspond to the structure of this chapter. First, McFadyen's and Barth's thought will be brought into explicit conversation in order to compare their respective methods more directly and clarify the differences between their approaches. Second, the conclusions about how theology should engage with secular discourse need to be stated and set out clearly. This will be done in the form of nine theses. And finally, we will return to the Webster/ Ford debate which was used in the opening chapter to set out the terms of the thesis.

2. A Comparison of Method in McFadyen and Barth

In this section McFadyen's and Barth's methods will be compared, first with respect to theological anthropology, and second with respect to the doctrine of sin. In

each case two main aspects of their approaches will be considered: the grounding for their theology; and the nature of the relation between theology and secular discourse.

2.1 Theological Anthropology

This subsection will focus on two key loci functioning in Karl Barth's and Alistair McFadyen's method in their theological anthropology.

1. Both Barth and McFadyen ground their theological anthropology in a doctrine of the Trinity and Christology. However, the priority accorded to each differs. Chapter 4 highlighted the Christological grounding of Barth's theological anthropology which functioned as the starting point for understanding both the vertical and horizontal relations. With regard to the former, Jesus' humanity is the ontological determination of our humanity and so the pressure of interpretation moved irreducibly from Jesus to the rest of humanity. The point here is that Jesus is the only 'real man'. This is not to say that there is not a prior conception of humanity functioning which Jesus adopts, rather that in adopting this humanity and transforming it, Jesus reveals the nature of 'real man'. Why? Because humankind is both revealed in and has its ontological determination in Jesus. The ontological status of humankind is determined in and with the being-in-relationship of the man Jesus to God. The basic determination of human being is therefore in being-with-God.

With regard to the horizontal relations, Jesus has the true creaturely form of man and is both man for God and man for man. The continuity between Jesus' humanity and our humanity is that the humanity of Jesus consists in the fact that he is for other men, and so, our humanity is like his in a 'basic form'. The basic form of humanity is in being in relation to, with, and for others. Our humanity is only evident

in relation to others, the negation of which is inhumanity or sinful humanity. Humanity is therefore essentially co-humanity.

The key point in Barth's method is his claim that theological anthropology, in both its vertical and horizontal relations, is derived primarily from Christology (both ultimately and operatively). The humanity of Jesus determines how true humanity is to be understood. Barth's primary concern is not with describing the 'phenomena of man', that is 'knives without edges, or handles without pots' as non-theological approaches do, rather Barth describes humanity understood as a creature before God. The main emphasis is that human beings are created relational beings in both the vertical and horizontal senses (the horizontal relations are not restricted to human relations). This is also true for McFadyen, and in this sense he, and most other contemporary relational anthropologists, is heavily indebted to Barth. But, whereas Barth's understanding of humanity derives from being grounded primarily in Christology, McFadyen's is rooted primarily in a doctrine of the Trinity. This is not to say that Trinity is not operative in Barth, or Christology in McFadyen, but that the overriding emphasis, the 'pressure of interpretation', is from these loci.

McFadyen therefore opens his anthropology by developing a doctrine of the Trinity and like Barth considers both the vertical and horizontal relations. In focusing on the vertical and horizontal relations, McFadyen operates with a concept of the *imago Dei* which is further expounded with regard to the horizontal relations with recourse to the 'call of Christ'. However, his ultimate starting point or theological ontology rests primarily on an understanding of God as triune. In other words, because human beings are understood first to be relational beings, the *imago Dei* is explored in both its vertical and horizontal dimensions. The grounding for understanding human beings as relational does not rest primarily in Christology as

with Barth, but with the Trinity. In doing this McFadyen is in good company (which may suggest a current dissatisfaction with Barth's Christological approach to anthropology) and he avoids a trap that many contemporary theological anthropologists fall into – moving immediately from relational concepts of the Trinity to human personhood.¹ However, his approach still rests upon this correspondence.

McFadyen develops an understanding of the immanent Trinity which by way of shorthand we might refer to as a 'social model'. By this I mean that the being and life of the Persons of the Trinity are inherently relational and perichoretic. Although not applied 'immediately' to human relations, there remains a close correspondence between divine and human personhood as can be seen in the following statement: "Just as the Persons of the Trinity receive and maintain their identities through relation, and relations of a certain quality, then so would human persons only receive and maintain their identities through relation with others and would stand fully in God's image whenever these identities and relations achieved a certain quality".² This quotation testifies to a basic difference in orientation between Barth's and McFadyen's anthropologies. They both describe human beings as relational, but Barth's grounding for this is an understanding of Jesus' humanity, whereas McFadyen's is an understanding of the immanent Trinity. At the risk of oversimplifying, McFadyen believes the Persons of the Trinity to be constituted by their relations and so human beings too are constituted by relations. The difference lies in the point of comparison for the analogy.

Two aspects of McFadyen's theology are understated at this point. The first is the significance of the economic Trinity for human personhood which tends to be

¹ Alistair I. McFadyen, 'The Trinity and Human Individuality: The Conditions for Relevance', in *Theology*, 95, 1992, pp10-18.

² This thesis draws heavily from Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p31.

translated almost entirely into Christological terms. As a result there is an underdeveloped role for the agency of the Holy Spirit in human being and identity (which is also largely true for Barth). Secondly, McFadyen's Christology centres on the 'call of Christ'. This has the benefit of emphasising both the personal dimensions of the call as well as the necessity of the transformation of the human situation from a point outside it. However, McFadyen's Christology is also deficient. The main way in which this is evident is perhaps the absence of the priesthood of Christ, that is, the mediatorial significance of Jesus' life for human personhood. This means that the methodological grounding of McFadyen's theological anthropology effectively functions in two main ways. The first is a comparison of divine and human relations in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions, the second is the dialogical nature of human relations on the basis of the call of Christ. To this extent, we are essentially left with a God-human/ human-God relation (which is extended to human-human/ human-world relations), and a Christ figure as exemplar – exemplar, that is, of conducting undistorted dialogical relations.

Because Barth's anthropology derives from Christology, the God-human/ human-God relations are mediated through the person of Christ thus becoming God-Christ-human/ human-Christ-God relations. To this extent, Barth is not dependent upon maintaining a direct continuity between divine and human personhood and in fact maintains a radical discontinuity ('an infinite qualitative distinction' even³), between divine and human personhood. Similarly, in emphasising the priesthood of Christ, Jesus is not only mediator, nor an exemplar of undistorted relations, but of true

³ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Sixth Edition, (trans.) Edwyn C. Hoskyns, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p10.

humanity, i.e., humanity as it was created to be.⁴ The main difference here is that for Barth, humanity is ontically constituted by being-in-relation to God not by identifying a correspondence between human and intra-trinitarian relations.

Barth's and McFadyen's approaches to theological anthropology represent two different but not mutually exclusive ways of approaching the subject. In short, Barth's primary locus is Christology and McFadyen's the Trinity. However, the doctrine of the Trinity is also operative in Barth and Christology in McFadyen as we have seen in the above chapters. What is interesting is that most contemporary approaches to theological anthropology many of which are heavily indebted to Barth – not least in the current re-invigoration of trinitarian theology – tend to approach anthropology primarily through the doctrine of the Trinity and not Christology. Additionally, much of the content of contemporary anthropologies is not dissimilar from Barth's. The ramifications of this observation are not to be drawn here other than recognising that McFadyen, along with many contemporary theologians, is both in direct continuity and discontinuity with Barth's approach. Let us now consider the differences in their relation to secular discourse.

2. The relation between theology and secular discourse in McFadyen's and Barth's theological anthropology has been explored at length in Chapters 2 and 4 above, but it is worth clarifying aspects of the relation. Let us begin with Barth.

The distinction between theological and secular discourse is not always one that applies easily to Barth. This is mainly because Barth's primary concern is with the extent to which all thinking is determined by the Word of God. However, the distinction still works on account of a basic difference in method. For Barth,

⁴ It is worth noting that Barth has been criticised by T. F. Torrance for having an inadequate understanding of the priesthood of Christ. The point I make here is relative to McFadyen, not a comment on Barth's theology more widely.

theological anthropology begins with dogmatics, not an *a priori* philosophy, cosmology, or world-view. Consequently, Barth's thought falls into Type 4 of Hans Frei's typology. By way of contrast, most other theological and non-theological anthropologies operate with a prior worldview or general concept of humankind from which the anthropology develops. In this respect Barth definitely maintains the 'priority of God in theological method' by giving theology ultimate priority.

Barth's concern is not to offer a description of humankind in the way many other anthropologies do, especially in the social sciences, rather his concern is with 'true' humanity. As a result, his theology is necessarily theological (as true humanity can only be understood in relation to God) and secular discourse does not have a major role to play in his anthropology. Insofar as Barth does describe the 'phenomena of man' he draws heavily from secular discourse. In this regard he writes: "Definitions of man as man interprets himself, however, are not necessarily wrong. Ancient and modern natural science, or rather the respective philosophies of nature, teach us that man must be understood as a definitely peculiar and remarkable factor within the cosmo-terrestrial, the physical-chemical, and the organic biotic processes of universal existence".⁵ Put differently, secular discourses have their place and can be used as valuable recourses for describing aspects of human being. They cannot, however, be afforded ultimate priority. Hence, Barth's engagement with secular discourse fits within a broadly theological framework and is used to describe further aspects of human being that theology is unable to do. Therefore secular discourse is afforded operative priority insofar as it is governed by theology which has ultimate priority.

⁵ Karl Barth, 'The New Humanism and the Humanism of God', in *Theology Today*, 8, 1951-1952, p161.

Although engagement with secular discourse is not a priority for Barth, nor is it understood to be necessary for the theological task, his treatment of secular discourse is always rigorous and attempt is made to take it seriously on its own terms (i.e. within its own framework of understanding). Barth's *use* of secular discourse falls within a theological framework (i.e. how he employs secular discourse within his theology), but his *reading* of secular discourse attempts to understand it from within its own frames of reference (i.e. putting his theological framework aside for the duration of his reading). On account of this point, and that he engages with a broader range of secular discourses than McFadyen, it was argued above that Barth takes secular discourse more seriously. Additionally, Barth's approach to theological anthropology respects the boundaries between itself and secular discourse. This is a direct result of his understanding of theological science – having both the form and content being determined by the object of enquiry. The pressure of interpretation is from the object to the human enquirer and not the reverse. To this extent Barth's approach is open to illumination and criticism from other disciplines which similarly seek to let the object determine the method of enquiry.

Barth's approach enables a fruitful dialogue between theology and secular discourse precisely because it respects the boundaries between the various disciplines. The uniqueness and distinctness of the disciplines are maintained by engaging with the other on its own terms (i.e. within its own framework of understanding), because each discipline recognises the givens which cannot be established from outside its own frame of reference. This is an important point for theological engagement with secular discourse. One example of this can be seen in film. A film can only 'work' if it is allowed its own voice and, consequently, the viewer enters into the framework of the film for at least the duration of the film. In this respect, film can have operative

priority – especially during its duration, but second order reflection on film gives theology (or the viewer's perspective) ultimate priority. Only in this way is it possible to allow the other to be other without doing it violence.

Barth therefore does have a place for engagement with secular discourse, but it is very much in keeping with Type 4 of Frei's typology. He does, however, lay down the foundations for a more open dialogue with secular discourse whilst maintaining the ultimate priority of God. The scope for development is immediately evident in McFadyen's description of his aims:

What I intend, therefore, is not simply a new recourse to traditional Christian apologetics, and much less is it a simple recourse to a Barthian form of Dogmatic theology. I am more willing to take the risks of a meaningful and open dialogue with non-Christian thought than the latter would allow. As regards the former, I am not seeking to justify to non-Christians conclusions reached within the circle of faith through independent theological reflection by dressing them up in the language of secular thought.⁶

Chapter 2 above developed an understanding of McFadyen's method at length. In particular, the significance of two 'Rules' was stressed: maintaining the Barthian priority of God in theological method and critical engagement with the determinate situation. McFadyen set up his approach in such a way that a dialogue with secular discourse was a necessary aspect of his theology as well as his understanding of the task of theology. This gave McFadyen at least one distinct advantage over most other theological anthropologies – he was able to engage with the actual (structure of) relations by which persons are constituted. As a result, McFadyen's thought falls between Types 3 and 4. He is keen to maintain, and for the most part successfully manages to maintain, both the dialogue/correlation with secular discourse of Type 3 and the priority of God of Type 4. To this extent, McFadyen's thought can be understood as a basic development of Barth's towards Type 3. The fundamental

⁶ CTP, pp11-12.

premises for McFadyen's approach are evident in Barth's thought, but McFadyen is more willing to develop them than Barth.

Like Barth, McFadyen definitely gives the trinitarian self-revelation of God ultimate priority, and like Barth, is prepared to allow secular discourse operative priority. The main difference between Barth and McFadyen here lies in the emphasis that is given to secular discourse. McFadyen allows secular discourse far greater operative priority in his theology than Barth does. McFadyen's account of secular discourse notwithstanding, it is allowed operative priority in his theology to the extent that it informs explicitly both the form and content of his theology. However, because of the extent of McFadyen's engagement with secular discourse, it can be argued that his account *could have* been offered without recourse to theology and remain substantially unchanged (albeit not by McFadyen). As a result, it was not always entirely clear what the distinctive contribution that could be made by theology for an understanding of personhood.

At this point we can draw two conclusions. First, McFadyen is extending Barth's general orientation towards Type 3, but is remaining consistent to Barth's premises and fundamental outlook. Second, McFadyen is more open to dialogue with secular discourse and allowing secular discourse to determine the form and content of theology than Barth, but Barth takes it more seriously than McFadyen. We now turn to their respective doctrines of sin.

2.11 The Doctrine of Sin

Analogous to the previous subsection, attention will centre around two main loci in Barth's and McFadyen's doctrines of sin: the theological grounding for their theology and the nature of the relation between theology and secular discourse.

1. Many of the same methodological dynamics that were evident in Barth's and McFadyen's theological anthropology are also evident in their respective doctrines of sin. We will begin again with Barth.

The core of Barth's approach to theological method regarding the doctrines of evil and sin is that evil and sin can only be understood (described not explained) in the light of its overcoming in Jesus Christ. In other words, the pressure of interpretation is irreducibly from knowledge of Jesus' redemptive activity to knowledge of evil and sin. Knowledge of evil and sin is not only not a requirement for knowledge of Jesus' redemptive activity, it cannot lead to knowledge of this activity. In this respect, knowledge of sin and evil are to be understood as an aspect of the doctrine of revelation, that is, a consequence of the knowledge of God. It is important to note that sin and evil do not originate in God, only that knowledge of sin and evil come through knowledge of God. Sin and evil are ultimately inexplicable and are to be understood as a 'third factor' in creation – originating neither with God, nor creation.

The key point is again that knowledge of evil and sin can only come through knowledge of its overcoming in Jesus Christ. In terms of method this means that Barth does not begin with a prior, general, conception of evil and sin from which theological reflection derives, rather the conception of evil and sin is the result of his Christological orientation. Analogous to his anthropology, the issue is not quite as black and white as this. To use the words 'evil' and 'sin' necessarily requires a prior conception of their meaning and what this might entail. Barth does not deny this, and to this extent does operate with a prior conception of sin and evil. However, the point is that our understanding of sin and evil is reconfigured in the light of Jesus Christ. We can only understand 'true' or 'real' sin and evil from this perspective. The

pressure of interpretation is irreducibly and emphatically from knowledge of Jesus to knowledge of sin. Apart from knowledge of Christ, not only is it not possible to describe true sin and evil, it is not even possible to recognise true sin and evil.

In the light of Christ, nothingness (evil) can be seen as "the 'reality' which opposes and resists God, which is itself subjected to and overcome by His opposition and resistance".⁷ Nothingness is characterised by its menacing of both God and the creature and evil is the actualisation of this menace. The concrete form of nothingness is sin. However, knowledge of nothingness cannot be derived through knowledge of sin. Rather, knowledge of sin and nothingness has its basis in God's work in Jesus Christ. Consequently Barth's knowledge of sin derives from that which it opposes in Jesus Christ: sin as pride is in opposition to the humiliation of God in Jesus Christ, sin as sloth is in opposition to the exaltation of humanity in Jesus Christ, and sin as falsehood is in opposition to the true witness in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ therefore functions as the hermeneutical key through whom knowledge of sin and evil derives. As with his anthropology, Barth's hamartiology is irreducibly Christological and derives from a Christological base. This is perhaps the key difference between Barth's and McFadyen's approach.

There is a sense in which McFadyen's *Bound to Sin* does not develop a doctrine of sin, rather it uses the doctrine of sin for various purposes. To this extent, it is not easy to identify what McFadyen's doctrine actually is, other than that he affirms strongly an orthodox, western approach to sin giving particular weight to the doctrine of original sin. In this respect, McFadyen's hamartiology is in strong continuity with Barth's. An entrance to McFadyen's doctrine can be found in the latter stages of his book where sin is developed as idolatry.

⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/3: The Doctrine of Creation*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, p305.

Sin and idolatry can be understood as that which counters the dynamics of God in creation and salvation. The contrast to sin in this sense is joy, faith, and worship of the trinitarian God which is characterised by an abundant and flourishing life. This highlights the core methodological difference between McFadyen and Barth. Barth's hamartiology is rooted primarily in Christology, whereas McFadyen's is again rooted primarily in the doctrine of the Trinity. Both McFadyen and Barth affirm strongly that knowledge of sin can only come from its overcoming. Similarly, Barth's hamartiology is somewhat dependent upon the doctrine of the Trinity, and McFadyen's on Christology, but their emphases are different – corresponding to their respective emphases in their anthropologies. The central difference in theological method between Barth and McFadyen derives from the weight they respectively attribute to Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity.

The main benefit McFadyen gains from giving methodological priority to the doctrine of the Trinity over and above Christology is that it offers the opportunity to have a more dynamic conception of sin than is perhaps the case in Barth. McFadyen's emphasis on the dynamics of relation, both in terms of sin itself and in terms of standing before God, allows him to consider the structural dimensions of evil and sin in a way that is often underdeveloped in many hamartiologies. Consequently, McFadyen unpacks at length the pathological dynamics of two concrete pathologies and demonstrates effectively both how the individual is incorporated into the pathological dynamic (unwillingly), and at the same time how the individual is personally responsible for his/her (willing) role in the dynamic. To this extent, McFadyen's doctrine of sin has benefited hugely both from grounding his doctrine primarily in the dynamics of worship of the triune God and by engaging with secular discourse.

However, a few weaknesses were also identified in McFadyen's doctrine of sin. Perhaps the most important was paying insufficient attention to the significance of 'brokenness' resulting from sin for both method and content. Barth recognised the implications of sin for his theology although did not incorporate it into his theology sufficiently, whereas McFadyen does not seem to pay attention to this aspect of the doctrine at all. In terms of method, McFadyen's most constructive theological contribution occurs at the end of the book and does so without much reconstruction in the light of either the contributions from secular discourse (hence it was suggested that McFadyen offers a theological critique of some forms of secular discourse rather than a genuine form of 'testing'), or in the light of the significance of the material that he is dealing with. Therefore, in relation to content, McFadyen's account of the dynamics of worship which are characterised by abundant and joyous living seems a bit weak at the end of a book focusing on child abuse and the holocaust. In short, McFadyen does not appear to take suffering and redemption seriously enough in his theological account of the doctrine of sin (which may suggest an inadequate theology of the cross). Barth's Christological orientation precludes this potential problem as the Incarnation and atonement is precisely this story. As a result, Barth's doctrine of sin proper occurs as chapters within a three part volume on the doctrine of reconciliation. However, the most significant differences between Barth and McFadyen come through in how they conceive the relation between theology and secular discourse to which we now turn.

2. The relationship between theology and secular discourse in both Barth's and McFadyen's doctrines of sin remains substantially the same as was the case in their respective anthropologies. For Barth, theology again retained ultimate priority

and secular discourse was afforded some operative priority – albeit less so than in his anthropology. By way of contrast, McFadyen's relation to secular discourse was heavily indebted to the approach adopted in his anthropology but was further developed for his doctrine of sin. However, this is not to suggest that either Barth's or McFadyen's approaches were uninformative for understanding the relation between theological and secular discourse. We will again begin with Barth.

With regard to hamartiology, Barth's main engagement with secular discourse occurred in his section on *das Nichtige*. It was suggested that this was largely because secular discourses rarely discuss a notion of 'sin' which is an explicitly theological term, whereas secular discourses do discuss notions of 'evil'. However, the same basic method which was evident in Barth's anthropology was again evident in his hamartiology. Insofar as there is a difference between his approach to anthropology and sin with regard to secular discourse it is one of emphasis. This emphasis is not so much new in his hamartiology as more evident.

From the outset Barth's theology has been characterised as a *Nachdenken* – of the Word of God. Theology is necessarily an *a posteriori* activity which proceeds primarily from an understanding of who Jesus Christ was and is. Every area of Christian doctrine is developed from a starting point in Jesus Christ. This was seen to be the case in both Barth's anthropology and hamartiology. However, in his hamartiology the 'methodological purity' of Barth's approach becomes particularly evident. In his section on *das Nichtige* in which Barth engages with secular discourse, we find that Barth engages with various theological approaches alongside Leibniz, Heidegger and Sartre. One implication of this that has been emphasised throughout the thesis is that 'secular discourse' may not always be the most appropriate category to use to analyse Barth's thought. However, from Barth's perspective there is a sense

in which it is an extremely appropriate category. Barth was not concerned so much with whether or not thinking was explicitly theological, but the extent to which all forms of thought are conformed to the Word of God. Consequently, many 'theological' approaches are considered alongside 'secular' approaches. Given the absolute methodological purity and consistency of Barth's approach, there is no distinction to be made between 'theological' and 'non-theological' thought – all thinking that is *not* conformed to the Word of God is secular, and this may well include some prominent 'theologians'. For instance, in his theological anthropology Barth engages with four main anthropological approaches of the modern period: naturalism (Zöckler, Otto, Titius, and Portmann), idealism (Fichte), existentialism (Jaspers) and theistic anthropology (Brunner). Emil Brunner, whom many consider to be one of the foremost theologians of the twentieth century, is dealt with alongside secular approaches, the implication being that his thought is 'secular'.⁸

With regard to Barth's hamartiology, we find Julius Müller and F. E. D. Schleiermacher being considered alongside the philosophers G. W. Leibniz, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre. The main difference here with his theological anthropology arises from the way in which content informs method. For Barth, sin is essentially a theological concept which is at root a form of disobedience and unbelief. From this it follows that thinking that is not conformed to the Word of God – secular discourse (whether or not it is 'theological') – is, in a manner of speaking, 'sin'. 'Secular discourse' – thinking which is not conformed to the Word of God – corresponds to sin insofar as it is not orientated to the Word of God. Thus, many 'theological' approaches are, according to Barth's method, both secular and sinful.

⁸ As a result, Barth dismisses Brunner very easily on occasions. For example: "Brunner's contribution to this matter [the virgin birth] in his more recent book, *Man in Revolt*, is so bad that my only possible attitude to it is silence" (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000, p184).

Two further points are worth mentioning here. First, in the light of the current *Zeitgeist*, Barth's method may appear to be astonishingly arrogant and indeed there is a strong sense in which this is the case. But this point is worth qualifying in two respects. First, Barth himself did not make any claim that his own thought corresponded to the Word of God in this way. In fact, he was exceptionally open about his own fallibility. And second, to assess Barth's method from outside it is, to some extent, to miss his point. Making the claim of arrogance involves standing outside his framework in order to make a value-judgement that there is a better starting point than Jesus Christ for doing theology, i.e. adopting a general framework for understanding from which Barth's is judged. The claim that Barth's approach is arrogant rests upon his methodological purity and the absolute consistency of his approach. Whether or not he was right to insist on his method in the way that he did, the rigour and consistency with which it was applied cannot fail to impress. It is precisely because of this that Barth is able to maintain the ultimate priority of God in theological method at every point. However, it might well be asked whether Barth's theological method is applied too rigidly with reference to secular discourse. The 'theologic' of his method certainly demands that 'secular discourse' (in both the senses used here) should be governed by theology at every point, but secular discourses afford greater insight into the human situation than Barth seems to allow.

The problem here is that to ask after the validity of secular approaches to anthropology and sin again runs the risk of missing Barth's main point — that knowledge of self and sin is a variation of knowledge of God and therefore can only be known in the light of Jesus Christ. By way of contrast, McFadyen manages to maintain the priority of God in theological method and also recognises the significance of secular contributions for a Christian understanding of sin and evil.

Consequently, McFadyen is not only open to theology being criticised (and reconstructed) by secular discourse to a far greater extent than Barth would allow, but furthermore, that conversation with secular discourse actually helps reveal the nature of Christian truth. As a result, McFadyen's doctrine of sin benefits from engagement with secular discourse in helping bring aspects of the doctrine to further light that have hitherto received insufficient attention. As stated in Chapter 3 above, examples include an explicit relation of the doctrine of sin to the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as to joy, faith and worship, a renewed understanding of original sin, the inadequacies of the tradition's emphasis on pride as the root sin, the drawing out and highlighting the significance of Augustine's understanding of the will, and an emphasis on the dynamic, comprehensive, energised and relational dimensions of sin.

It is clear from McFadyen's anthropology and hamartiology both that theology has benefited greatly by engaging with secular discourse, and that secular discourse – if it was prepared to listen to theology – might also benefit from the dialogue (not least by letting theology help reveal its own inner-truth). However, in a thesis pushing for 'dialogue', it must be asked whether 'dialogue' is always appropriate at every point. On occasions, McFadyen is in danger of overestimating the value of a dialogue between theology and secular discourse. For instance, the sixth methodological thesis (Chapter 3 above) states that "in order to be intelligible and true to itself, theology must necessarily engage in dialogue with secular forms of public explanation, understanding, and truth...". In other words, for McFadyen, it is a necessary condition for theology to be true to itself that it engages with secular discourse. To make dialogue with secular discourse a necessary condition for theology to be true to itself excludes the possibility that theologies of Type 5, and possibly Type 4, are capable of producing intelligible theologies that are 'true to

themselves'. This is simply not the case, and I have no doubt that McFadyen would want to affirm that John Webster, for instance, is indeed producing intelligible theology that is 'true to itself'. Dialogue with secular discourse cannot and must not be a necessary condition for theology however valuable the benefits which derive from such a dialogue.

There are a number of conclusions specific to the relation between Barth and McFadyen that can be drawn at this point before considering some more general conclusions about the relation between theology and secular discourse. In the light of their respective anthropologies it is clear that McFadyen is indeed extending Barth's basic orientation towards Type 3, but is also remaining consistent to Barth's premises and fundamental outlook. Additionally, McFadyen is more open to dialogue with secular discourse and allowing secular discourse to determine the form and content of theology than Barth, but Barth takes it more seriously than McFadyen. Both of these conclusions are confirmed again in their respective hamartiologies albeit with further qualification. With respect to the first conclusion, Barth is right to affirm that knowledge of self and knowledge of sin can be derived primarily from knowledge of God, but underestimates the scope of particularly the human sciences for informing these areas of dogmatics – a point which McFadyen addressed. With respect to the second conclusion, McFadyen takes secular discourse far more seriously than he does in his earlier work, and similarly gives it greater operative control in his theology – much more so than Barth would allow. Two further conclusions are also evident.

First, it has been suggested throughout the thesis that the distinction between theology and secular discourse is not always the most appropriate for Barth. In many ways this remains the case. However there is a sense in which it is an extremely

appropriate distinction for Barth in that, if anything, the boundaries between theology and secular discourse are drawn more rigidly and narrowly. Any thought form (including many 'theologies') that does not conform to the Word of God is 'secular', and therefore sinful (insofar as it is a form of disobedience and unbelief). If this is the case, and in the light of McFadyen's work it appears to be something of an overstatement, there remains a great deal of work to be done in spelling out the implications of this position for, say, the natural sciences, or mathematics. What does it mean for human biology to be done in conformity to the Word of God?⁹

Second, the significance and difficulty of walking the tight-rope between Types 3 and 4 is particularly clear. McFadyen is often in danger of falling off one side or the other, and as a result, tends to overestimate the place of dialogue with secular discourse in theology – to the extent that it is made a necessary condition. Bearing this in mind, Karl Barth was certainly right to affirm the importance of doing theology "as though nothing had happened" (Chapter 1 above). His theology, particularly his Christological orientation, has indeed served as a crucial check for how to approach theology by maintaining the priority of God in theological method. It now remains to present the conclusions to the thesis in a more general way.

3. *Learning from McFadyen and Barth: Nine Theses*

The central concern of the thesis was to investigate the role of secular discourse in theological anthropology and the doctrine of sin. In more general terms, the purpose was to explore the question 'how ought theology to be done with

⁹ Stanley Hauerwas has done some work in this area although he has yet to publish on it. However, one of his former doctoral students has published a book which gives some insight into Hauerwas' response to the question. See Joel J. Shuman, *The Body of Compassion: Ethics, Medicine, and the Church*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1999. One way of accessing the issue here is whether or not we choose our dentist because he or she is a Christian, or because they have a good record of not causing any pain with their patients.

particular respect to secular discourse?'. In other words, the thesis would fall short if the lessons to be learned from McFadyen and Barth were not expressed in a less specific way in order to be more applicable to theology in general. This section sets out nine theses without argument, but with brief explanation. In doing this two purposes are served. First, the nine theses function as a conclusion to the thesis as a whole – hence they will be set out without additional justification. And second, they shift the debate from the specific concerns and parameters of theological anthropology and the doctrine of sin to theology in general. The following section will return to the Webster/ Ford debate from the opening chapter.

Thesis 1: In order to be 'true to itself', it is crucial for theology to understand and reflect critically upon the trinitarian self-revelation of God as testified to in Christian Scripture, doctrine, tradition and history, and the social, cultural and intellectual world in which we are living.¹⁰

Thesis 1 does not suggest that engagement with secular discourse is a necessary but insufficient condition for theology to be theology. Theology is theology whether or not notice has been taken of other disciplines – I am not suggesting that theologies of Type 5 in Frei's typology are not theology. Approaches that only engage with the trinitarian self-revelation of God as testified to in Christian scripture, doctrine, tradition and history are theology. Similarly, as mentioned in Chapter 1 above, it is not a necessary condition for theology to engage with secular discourse all of the time. There is definitely an important role for 'straight dogmatics' in the Webster sense (especially in helping maintain the ultimate priority of God in

¹⁰Cf. CTP, pp10-11.

theological method). Neither does Thesis 1 suggest that it is a necessary but insufficient condition for theology to reflect on both poles in order to be true to itself. Again, theologies of Type 5 *can* certainly be true to themselves and engaged with the contemporary situation.¹¹ However, not only is this more likely to happen by engaging with secular discourse, it is facilitated by engaging with secular discourse.

This is the (overstated) point of the sixth methodological thesis in McFadyen's doctrine of sin (Chapter 3 above): 'in order to be intelligible and true to itself, theology must necessarily engage in dialogue with secular forms of public explanation, understanding, and truth, which both confront and permeate the situation of a living theological tradition'. Although it is not a 'necessary' condition for theology to be 'intelligible and true to itself', theology is certainly reminded of its own inner truth by engaging with secular discourse and enabled 'to do its job better'.¹² The uniqueness and distinctness of theology is maintained in, through, and by, conversing with secular discourse, not in spite of it. The reasons for this are twofold.

First, the great strength of McFadyen's approach to the doctrine of sin is that he seeks to show that a theological approach to two concrete pathologies could have greater descriptive and explanatory power than secular approaches. Although his argument is weakened by giving an insufficient account of secular approaches, his argument remains highly instructive in terms of method. What McFadyen shows successfully is that if theology has nothing to offer that cannot be stated sufficiently in secular frames of reference, theology as a discipline has failed. If reference to God does not make any actual difference as to how pathologies are understood, then this

¹¹ However, we might well ask if it is possible for theology to avoid secular discourse completely. In this case we would do well to distinguish between the deliberate employment of secular discourse and a broader conception of the influence of secular discourse. It might be possible, in theory at least, to avoid the former but not the latter.

¹² Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p271.

suggests first that secular accounts of pathologies are sufficient for understanding sin, and second, that the best theology can offer is a re-interpretation of secular accounts in theological language. In other words, it is by engaging with secular discourse that the distinctive contribution that theology can make is made clear. Secular discourse gives licence for theology to be *theology*, and furthermore reminds theology of its own inner-truth.

Following from this, it was also clear in McFadyen's doctrine of sin that secular discourse helped bring out aspects of a theological account of sin that have hitherto received insufficient emphasis in recent years. In particular, McFadyen related the doctrine of sin to the doctrine of the Trinity, and to joy, faith, and worship. Engagement with secular discourse also leads to a renewed understanding of original sin and the nature of the bondage of the will, highlighting the inadequacies of the tradition's emphasis on pride as the root sin, and emphasising the dynamic and relational dimensions of sin.

Second, the task of theology that has been developed in this thesis entails a single task with two aspects (engagement with 'the tradition', and 'culture'). On this understanding it can be said that it is a necessary (but insufficient) condition of theology to be true to itself that it engages with its cultural context. One of the main ways in which this is done is by engaging with secular discourse. Dialogue with secular discourse itself is not a necessary condition because engagement with the cultural context might occur through other means. However, it remains that dialogue with secular discourse is an extremely good way of engaging with the cultural context which in turn helps shapes the form and content of theology.

Thesis 2: Given that it is crucial for theology to engage with both poles, this is best approached from between Types 3 and 4 of Hans Frei's typology.

Theologies of Type 4 tend to recognise the significance of engaging with secular discourse as we have seen at length by looking at Barth's theology. However, theologies of this type do not allow secular discourse sufficient operative control within the theological framework. This was McFadyen's main objection to Barth's approach. Barth's theology gives a place to secular discourse and takes such discourses very seriously. However, Barth stops short of an 'open dialogue' with them. Secular discourse may be used to develop aspects of theology, but is operative only in this limited sense. Consequently McFadyen was 'more willing to take the risks of a meaningful and open dialogue with non-Christian thought than... [Barth] would allow'. It is in this sense that McFadyen remains in direct continuity with Barth's approach, but develops the position further towards Type 3.

Type 3 approaches, such as those offered by Paul Tillich or David Ford,¹³ tend to give too much weight to the cultural context, sometimes at the expense of theology. Tillich's 'method of correlation', for instance, allows 'culture' to pose the questions to which theology gives an answer. Although this approach is highly appealing given the understanding of theology being developed in this thesis, it falls short in two main ways. First, the resulting theology is highly existential in character which means that core aspects of the Christian faith are ultimately interpreted from within an existential framework, rather than the reverse. And second, 'culture' may not be asking the right questions.¹⁴ A theological engagement with culture should not be characterised by

¹³ Again I emphasise that Ford's work is placed in Type 3 for very different reasons than Tillich's. There are strong dissimilarities between their approaches. See Chapter 1 above.

¹⁴ Determining what the 'right' questions are does of course presuppose a specific teleology, as whether or not a question is 'right' is determined directly by the specific end in view. With Tillich's concern

giving a theological response to questions posed by the 'determinate situation' (to use Tillich's phrase) because a) culture and not theology would be determining the form and ultimately the content of theology, and b) the questions that should be asked about culture from a theological perspective may not be the same as those evident in the determinate situation. Theology must be engaged with the cultural context, but must ultimately be constructed on the basis of the 'priority of God'. Theologies of Type 3 simply do not give sufficient weight to Christian self-description. Consequently, it has been argued that engagement with secular discourse should occur somewhere between Types 3 and 4.

Approaching theology from between Type 3 and 4 is a difficult exercise which in Chapter 1 above was likened to trying to balance on a tight-rope. Because of this, McFadyen's theology tends towards one side or other on different occasions. It was argued that if falling off the tight-rope is to occur, it is better to fall off towards Type 4 as this does better justice to Christian self-description, hence Karl Barth was the dialogue partner in this thesis. Thesis 3 helps structure this approach.

Before turning to Thesis 3, an obvious question which has arisen which requires some attention. I have been arguing for a position 'somewhere between Types 3 and 4' and have highlighted the difficulty of maintaining this position consistently. One must ask, therefore, is this a new position being identified – say Type 3.5 – or is it simply a variation of Type 4? Furthermore, if it is a distinct type, why have not other commentators identified it before? In responding to these questions we must be reminded of two points.

for apologetics, 'culture' may well be asking the 'right' questions insofar as they are possible points of departure. My point is that the form and content of theology should be determined by the priority of God in theological method, which means that the ultimate primacy in the asking of theological questions must come from theology not culture.

First, in favour of Type 3.5, we might argue that this is in fact McFadyen's position. There is certainly some discontinuity between his position and Type 4, and he is prepared to give secular discourse far greater operative control in his theology than can be accommodated in Type 4. Additionally, it has also been suggested that maintaining this distinct type is like balancing on a tight-rope, and consequently, McFadyen (and possibly other potential exponents of Type 3.5) are in danger of falling off on one side or another. Put differently, there may well be occasions when an exponent of Type 3.5 may be closer to Type 3 than Type 4. Given this, a strong case can be made for affirming the existence of a distinct type – Type 3.5.

On the other hand, throughout the thesis, I have tried to argue that if an exponent of Type 3.5 is to fall off the tight-rope, it is better to veer towards Type 4 because this does better justice to the unique subject-matter of Christian theology. It follows from this that, for the most part, we might actually be dealing with a Type 3.75. An additional argument throughout the thesis has been that McFadyen's approach stands in fundamental continuity with Barth's and can be understood as a development of Barth's approach towards Type 3. This would strongly suggest that we are in fact dealing with a variation of Type 4 and not a distinct type.

To return to the original question, are we dealing with a Type 3.5 or a variation of Type 4? The answer depends on the weight attributed to the points just outlined. In my view, it is quite possible to affirm either. The major advantage of affirming a Type 3.5 is that it highlights both the continuity and discontinuity between itself and Types 3 and 4 (although this could of course be qualified within the scope of the narrative). Indeed Frei himself is reputed to have said that "he would probably place himself between Types 3 and 4 – but that 'aesthetically he found

himself participating in all five".¹⁵ However, my inclination would be to affirm a variant reading of Type 4 because of the importance of affirming the ultimate priority of the subject-matter of theology. In the light of this, we might be better to say that the position we are dealing with rests on the boundary (albeit just inside) of Type 4 which distinguishes it from Type 3. This position can only be maintained if we are prepared to have a fairly broad understanding of the scope of the types.¹⁶ If a more narrow approach was to be offered, we would have to affirm a Type 3.5. This question will be picked up again in the next main section.

Thesis 3: It is necessary for theology to maintain the 'priority of God' in its method, and this can be facilitated by recognising a distinction between ultimate and operative criteria.

The meaning of 'the priority of God' has been left fairly open in the thesis. It will be given a bit more content in Thesis 4 below. Following McFadyen, it has referred to the general point that the pressure of interpretation moves from theology (or more accurately the subject-matter of theology) to secular discourse. It might be given a more specific reference, referring for instance to the priority of grace, of theological language, of the doctrine of God, Christology and so on, but these would be specific ways of maintaining the priority of God in theological method. The aim in this thesis has been to argue that dogmatics in the Webster sense (Type 4/5), Christian self-description, doctrine, tradition, history, and so on, must be the primary determinative factor. However, engaging with the determinate situation is also a

¹⁵ David F. Ford, 'On Being Theologically Hospitable to Jesus Christ: Hans Frei's Achievement', *Journal of Theological Studies* 46.2, October, 1995, pp538, 544.

¹⁶ David Ford argues strongly that the Types must be read in this way (Ford, 'On Being Theologically Hospitable to Jesus Christ: Hans Frei's Achievement', pp536f.).

necessary aspect of the theological task. Maintaining the priority of God and the approach to theology through dialogue is facilitated by an important distinction between ultimate and operative priority.

The distinction between ultimate and operative priority has been unpacked and illustrated at length in all of the chapters above. It refers to the difference between a tacit framework which ultimately structures enquiry and a framework which might be used at any given moment. In short, the theological pole has ultimate priority and secular discourse may have operative priority at any given time. Making this distinction recognises both the varying significance of different kinds of frameworks of understanding and offers a structure through which the relation between theology and secular discourse can be thought through.

The danger of distinguishing between ultimate and operative priority is that a static approach might be implied. The distinction applies primarily to the starting point from which the 'pressure of interpretation' derives. However, although this point stands, it is better to think in more dynamic terms such as a 'field of force'. The starting point and the pressure of interpretation are fixed, but theology need not necessarily refer to the starting point or pressure of interpretation. It can operate within this dynamic and remain true to it without referring to it at every point. A good example of theology done in this way is Jeremy Begbie's recent book *Theology, Music and Time*. Begbie's conviction is that "music can serve to enrich and advance theology, extending our wisdom about God, God's relation to us and to the world at large".¹⁷ Consequently, Begbie approaches theology 'through music', and does so to the extent that he fears that some readers may consider his approach to be avocation of some forms of 'natural theology'. For Begbie, this leads to a concluding chapter

¹⁷ Begbie, *Theology*, p3.

on theological method where it is made unambiguously clear where his ultimate priorities lie, and that the preceding discussion was conducted in the light of these priorities. In short, Begbie gives ultimate priority to God in theological method, but conducts his discussion in the field of force deriving from this priority (the force of trinitarian self-revelation) without being rigidly constrained by it. His approach balances integrity to his theological framework as well as integrity to the musical academy.

A question remains about the correct methodological attitude in theology to the principle of non-contradiction. At its root, the principle affirms that for any statement p , p and $\sim p$ cannot both be true at the same time (e.g. x is black/ x is white). Taken as a 'law' of logic, the principle of non-contradiction is something that should be taken for granted in much theological enquiry. Theology is, after all, largely subject to the canons of rationality shared in the various departments in the university. Additionally, it is general thought that it is good for theology (or any discipline) to steer clear of 'irrationality'. And yet there are instances where the principle of non-contradiction can pose serious problems for theology. One obvious example of this is when in conflict with the Roman Catholic Church Copernicus, and later Galileo, rejected the Ptolemaic system of the universe and argued that the sun was the centre of the solar system. Essentially they were putting forward the claims of empirical science as a way of discovering truth. On many instances, such as this one, there is only an apparent contradiction. Consider the following two statements made at the same time by the same person: "The sun is shining. It is raining.". There need not be a contradiction between these two statements. Although it is true that on most occasions when it is raining, the sun is not shining, this is not always the case. There is no logical contradiction between the sun shining and having rain at the same time.

With regard to Copernicus and Galileo, there was not a necessary conflict between their position and theology. The Roman Church at the time was enmeshed in a particular world-view which prevented them from 'an open or mutually informative dialogue' about this issue. In this case, this does not mean that the object of theology or even 'theological truth' is called into question by the findings of empirical science. Rather, a particular world-view (which at the time was linked closely with theology) was called into question by the empirical realities of the situation (cf. Thesis 6 below). The problem arose on account of confusing this world-view with theological truth. If this were the case, there would be a contradiction. Instead, this example highlights one way in which secular discourse can challenge and help reformulate theology without theology losing its distinctive subject-matter.

However, just because this example in which the principle of non-contradiction was only in apparent conflict, this does not have to hold for all cases. There are possible circumstances under which secular 'truth' is in conflict with theological 'truth'. One need only mention the resurrection to see a whole host of problems arising here. On the one hand, secular truth claims that people do not rise from the dead. On the other hand, theological truth claims that Jesus rose from the dead. On the face of it there is a contradiction – either secular discourse has made a mistake, or Jesus did not rise from the dead. One way out of this particular dilemma would be to point to the form of argument under-girding the secular claim – the problem of induction. Another way would be to do some theological juggling such that God can on occasions break the laws of nature. Nevertheless, this only evades the issue. There may well be actual situations where there is a contradiction between theological and secular discourse which no amount of juggling can evade. What does the theologian do when faced with this problem?

Given the argument made in this thesis – that theological discourse should maintain ultimate priority – one solution would be simply to ignore it (as the Roman Church tried to do with Copernicus and Galileo) and risk the charge of being ‘invincibly arrogant’. Within the context of this thesis, Karl Barth’s approach might be argued to be the closest to this response given his theological method. So how would Barth deal with it? The first point to be raised is that Barth is not only open to finding truth in the secular as we have seen, but goes so far as to talk of ‘secular parables of the truth’.¹⁸ The main point here is that Barth emphasises that truth is often found outside the Church. However, with respect to the principle of non-contradiction this is only of passing interest. More importantly for Barth, secular words are only true insofar as they are in accordance with the Word of God. In other words, where truth is found in secular discourse, it is because it corresponds to the Word of God. In its harshest form, Barth evades the problem of the principle of non-contradiction by arguing that insofar as any discipline is true, it is because it is in accordance with the object of theology (note that theology itself does not have a monopoly on the truth). This means that if there is a contradiction, there is a problem either with the theological or secular formulation of truth. To quote George Hunsinger on Barth: “The inconceivability of the divine mystery does not mean that it is absurd or that it is to be explained as an absurdity. The Word of God is inconceivable, not self-contradictory”.¹⁹ When there are contradictions, the problem lies in our formulations of the truth (or possibly the inconceivability of the divine

¹⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/3.i: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999, esp. pp118-135. This has been unpacked at some length by George Hunsinger in his essay ‘Epilogue: Secular Parables of the Truth’ (George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of his Theology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁹ Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, p197.

mystery).²⁰ The point is that it is impossible for there to be an actual contradiction between theological and secular truth (otherwise it would not be 'true' to the Word of God), only apparent contradictions. Theology can, therefore, be corrected by secular discourse.

Thesis 4: Two main loci help maintain the priority of God in theological method: the doctrine of the Trinity, and Christology.

Perhaps the greatest strength of Barth's theology is his absolute consistency in deriving all theology from his understanding of God's self-revelation in Christ through the Spirit. For Barth this means that every aspect of theology derives from Christology. Whether or not Christology should be accepted as *the* starting point for all theology is open to question, but the consequence of this in his thought is that every aspect of theology, and indeed all his interaction with secular discourse, is governed by God's self-revelation in Christ. The 'methodological purity' of Barth's approach not only allows the priority of God in theological method to be a possibility, but it makes it a necessity. All his thinking follows from this starting point, that is, to restate an earlier point, theology takes the form of a *Nachdenken*.

In McFadyen's theology, the role afforded to Christology in Barth's theology was largely adopted by the Trinity. As mentioned above, the relationship between the person of Christ and the trinitarian persons is obviously closely interconnected, but in terms of theological method, Christology and the Trinity function slightly differently (which was explored in the previous section). However, McFadyen's basis in trinitarian theology also necessitates the priority of God in his theology.

²⁰ For further discussion of this see Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, pp195-198, and 264-269 (with discussion of Barth's four-fold criteria for discerning the truth).

The dialogue between Barth and McFadyen shows that it is not necessary for the starting point of theology to be Christology or the Trinity, rather that both Christology and the Trinity function as necessary loci in the theological framework. Any Christian theology which adopts a framework where Christology and the Trinity are not afforded ultimate priority is deficient. To repeat a point made under Thesis 3, this does not mean that all theology has to derive explicitly from Christology and the Trinity at every point, rather it has to function with integrity to that theological framework. Again to repeat an example, Jeremy Begbie writes at the end of his book: “my intention throughout has been to allow the ultimate ‘pressure of interpretation’ to come not from musical practice considered in and of itself (as some kind of autonomous, normative arbiter), but from a focus on the activity of the triune God, definitively disclosed in Jesus Christ, whose purpose is the participation of the world – including music – in his own triune life”.²¹

Thesis 5: Where theology and secular discourse are not incommensurable, the relation between theology and secular discourse should be mutually illuminating insofar as possible.

In approaching theology by means of the kind of dialogue outlined in this thesis, it is important to recognise that there may well be forms of secular discourse with which dialogue is not possible. Some forms of secular discourse may be constructed in explicit antagonism to theology and so the notion of a ‘mutually illuminating dialogue’ simply does not apply. However, this does not mean that

²¹ Begbie, *Theology*, p278.

theology cannot benefit from this relationship, only that dialogue cannot occur.²² To some extent, Barth's engagement with secular discourse in his discussion of *das Nichtige* might be an example of this. Barth considered secular discourse 'on its own terms', and found much that he could draw on – particularly in Heidegger and Sartre – but the pressure of interpretation did not appear to be mutual. Barth (theology) was open to illumination and critique from secular discourse, but there is no apparent reason why the reverse would be true. In a framework in which God is excluded (*a priori*), there is no reason why secular discourse should listen to theology, unless of course theology can demonstrate the validity of its own distinctive contribution by, for instance, showing greater explanatory and descriptive power of a pathology (Thesis 1).

However, most forms of secular discourse are open to some form of dialogue, especially if the distinctive contribution that theology can make is clear. In this case the dialogue can be mutually illuminating to the extent that each discipline is open to learning from the other. Chapters 2, 3, and 5 particularly illustrated some of the ways in which this kind of a dialogue might occur as well as highlighting some of the possibilities for further development.²³

McFadyen's *Bound to Sin* is a good example of how theology and secular discourse might begin to illuminate each other. His basic method could be extended to incorporate a number of other areas. For instance, a theological account of guilt, shame, and possibly original sin might have much to offer a sociological or psychological account of narcissism (and vice versa).²⁴ Similarly, a theological account of what it is to be a creature before God might have significant scope for contributing to ecological issues. It is an essential aspect of the theological task to

²² It is also worth noting that this situation is not particularly common.

²³ Again Begbie's *Theology, Music and Time* might also serve as an example.

²⁴ Cf. Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

show how a distinctive theological account might aid secular disciplines (in addition to helping show secular discourses their own inner truth – Chapter 3 above). There is also a great deal for theology to learn from secular disciplines. At a very basic level, an account of evolution offered by the natural sciences poses significant issues for some accounts of the doctrine of creation. In such cases, the natural sciences can help to provide a hermeneutical framework for reading the Genesis creation accounts. This does not entail giving the natural sciences ultimate priority, but the operative priority of them in a particular instance. Chapters 2-5 above also demonstrate some ways in which theological accounts are illuminated by secular discourses.

A danger is also evident here. It is not inconceivable that concern for a mutually illuminating dialogue might focus on the parallels and continuities between theology and secular discourse to such an extent that the recognition of our epistemic alienation from God might be overlooked. Theological enquiry emphatically cannot be conducted in a supposedly neutral, sin-free territory. Indeed we might go so far as to say that this is impossible.²⁵ As we have seen in above chapters, all human thinking, whether or not it is explicitly theological, is subject to the corrupting effects of sin. The question of proper discernment must drive the theologian back, time and time again, to Christology, the atonement, and ‘straight systematics’.

Thesis 6: There should be a critical relation between theology and secular discourse where both are tested by each other's understanding and by the empirical realities of the situation.

²⁵ In the opening pages of his *Church Dogmatics* Barth makes this very point: “To set itself in a systematic relationship to other sciences, theology would have to regard its own separate existence as necessary in principle. But this is the very thing it cannot do. It cannot think of itself as a link in an ordered cosmos, but only as a stop-gap in a disordered cosmos”. (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, (eds.) Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995 p10).

Thesis 6 is closely related to Thesis 5. In addition to a mutually illuminating dialogue, theology and secular discourse should have a mutually critical relation. McFadyen's *Bound to Sin* essentially offered a theological critique of some forms of secular discourse, as did Barth's doctrine of *das Nichtige*. At the same time, the doctrine of sin (particularly so in McFadyen's case) was criticised by some secular accounts. Given that most theological and secular discourses function within a different frame of reference, there is often considerable scope for a critical engagement with the other, through which both sides of the dialogue can benefit.

Both McFadyen's anthropology and doctrine of sin testified to the importance of theology being related to praxis. One way in which theology was enabled to do this in McFadyen's thought was on account of his openness to letting theology be challenged and reconfigured by the empirical realities of the situation. This was most evident in his account of the sexual abuse of children and the holocaust. In these cases, many traditional accounts of sin would, like some of the secular accounts McFadyen highlighted, also be inadequate. This approach also comes through particularly clearly in some feminist accounts of sin, not least in their challenge to the tradition's insistence on pride as the root sin.²⁶ Most feminist accounts find the tradition's (over-)emphasis on pride to be an inadequate representation of the experience of many women, thus women's experience helps reconfigure a theological account of sin (Chapter 3).²⁷ A similar approach can also be found in Fred Berthold's

²⁶ See esp. Chapter 3 above, footnote 54.

²⁷ Although they come to very different conclusions, this approach is evident in Rita N. Brock, and Susan B. Thistlethwaite, *Casting Stones: Prostitution and Liberation in Asia and the United States*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. See Chapter 3, footnote 6 above.

and Daniel Price's dialogue between Barth and various psychological approaches to the self especially by means of psychoanalysis (Chapters 4 and 5).²⁸

The construction of Thesis 6 might appear to advocate a third position in addition to theology and secular discourse – 'the empirical realities of the situation'. There is a sense in which this is the case. In addition to their unique object of enquiry, all forms of discourse are tested by the empirical realities of the situation. So to draw on an earlier example, the empirical realities of the situation led Copernicus and Galileo to shift from a Ptolemaic to a heliocentric understanding of the universe. The truth claims of a Ptolemaic cosmology were called into question by empirical method. However, the danger of positing three positions (the theological, the secular, and empirical reality) is that it makes them appear much more distinct than they are. In the opening chapter above, it was pointed out that the division between theology and secular discourse is a forced one. Similarly, there cannot be knowledge of the empirical realities of the situation without a form of discourse. Empirical reality does not stand apart from discourse as an entity which can be known as 'a thing-in-itself'. The relationship is more intertwined. However, it would be fair to say that for many forms of secular discourse (especially the sciences), the empirical realities of the situation is their object of enquiry.

The key point about 'testing' lies in the openness of a particular discipline (whether theological or secular) to be criticised and possibly corrected and reformulated by other sources. McFadyen's doctrine of sin was intended to be a theological exercise in this regard. On the one hand, his doctrine was challenged by the 'empirical realities of the situation' by means of secular discourse. On the other, secular discourse was challenged by the interpretation of the pathologies offered by

²⁸ Fred Berthold Jr., 'Theology and Self-Understanding: The Christian Model of Man as a Sinner', in Homans, *The Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology*, Chapter 1, pp11-32; and Daniel J. Price, *Karl Barth's Anthropology in Light of Modern Thought*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

theology. As we have seen, the problem with McFadyen's project is that there is a real question about the extent to which this actually happened, or whether a theological critique of some forms of secular discourse was offered.

'Testing' is also to be conducted from within the constraints of the discipline itself. So for example, the Holocaust raises significant challenges for a belief in a loving, good and omnipotent God such that theology is forced to ask certain kinds of 'how' questions. If satisfactory answers cannot be offered, the very heart of theology is called into question. Similarly, if a doctrine of sin cannot offer an account of how these sorts of atrocities are possible, theology as a discipline has failed. In both these cases, theology is tested by the empirical realities of the situation.

One further question arises here – that of how to evaluate the challenges or instances of testing that arise, especially when they attack core assumptions. What happens when the ultimate object of theology is challenged in this way as in connecting the Holocaust to the (non-)existence of God? Only two small points can be offered in response to this question. First, there cannot be an Archimedean point from which to judge such challenges (cf. Thesis 9). Any form of testing, or evaluation of testing, is always from a particular standpoint. For the most part, this standpoint is from the ultimate criteria functioning within the discipline. When these are seriously challenged, they can only be done from another standpoint within the discipline, and if the objects of the challenge really are the ultimate criteria, only with great difficulty. Ultimate criteria can only be considered temporarily from another viewpoint else this position becomes the ultimate one. If the challenge appears to be devastating, the theologian will then have to make a choice between conceding to the challenge or ignoring it (cf. the principle of non-contradiction in Thesis 3 above). However, it is important to bear in mind that there are other criteria operating in the

theologian's armoury in addition to logic – not least 'special revelation'. This leads to our second point.

For the Christian theologian, there are no *a priori*, objective criteria from which all challenges can be considered (see Thesis 9 below). The best we can do is affirm the priority of God in theological method, that is, the centrality of the self-revelation of God in Christ through the Spirit. In practice, this means that the discipline of theology has to be sensitive to the agency of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, prayer and worship form a crucial part of the practice of theology – as we have seen in McFadyen's work in Chapter 3 above.

Thesis 7: Secular discourse and theology should be taken seriously by attempting to understand the other's position on its own terms, and the (flexible) boundaries between the disciplines should be maintained.

The contrast between McFadyen and Barth testifies to the necessity of taking the dialogue partner seriously. Although McFadyen's method lends itself to a more open dialogue with secular discourse than Barth's, Barth recognises a broader range of discourses than McFadyen, and to this extent does not homogenise them. Even though McFadyen's argument does stand in both *The Call to Personhood* and *Bound to Sin*, the former book identifies with forms of secular discourse that fit very well with the theological framework that is being developed, and the latter ultimately offers a 'straw man' version of secular discourse. The dialogue with secular discourse was amongst the most fruitful and challenging to have appeared in recent years, but the argument was weakened by giving insufficient attention to the multifaceted

accounts of the will apparent in secular discourse. It is a necessary condition for engaging with secular discourse that the other is taken seriously.²⁹

Part of what is meant by taking the other seriously involves an attempt to understand the other on its own terms. This does not entail loss of theology's own integrity, it simply means that respecting other disciplines and taking them seriously involves attempting to understand them from within their own frames of reference.³⁰ This was apparent in both McFadyen and Barth, albeit less so in McFadyen. In attempting to understand other disciplines on their own terms, theology does not give up the ultimate priority of God, but gives operative priority to the other discipline at that particular time. To repeat an earlier example, a film can only 'work' if the audience enters into the framework of understanding (or at least the parameters of the film) for at least its duration.

One of the great strengths of Barth's theological anthropology is that it recognises and respects the boundaries between the disciplines. The boundaries are not so solid that mutual dialogue cannot occur, nor are they flexible enough to be in danger of losing the discipline's distinctive identity. This means that there is scope for each discipline to learn from and be criticised by other disciplines without loss of their own integrity.³¹

Thesis 8: The dialogue should move from the particular to the general.

²⁹ This is to be distinguished from Barth's use of the phrase when he suggests that, for instance, evil is not to be taken seriously. By this Barth means that the theological agenda is in no way to be set by evil, but evil does of course have a place within it. In this sense, evil is taken seriously but is not given any authority.

³⁰ In some cases this may mean 'leaving God aside' for the entirety of the dialogue as in Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself As Another* ((trans.) Kathleen Blamey, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), in which he self-consciously adopts a position of agnosticism for the purposes of his argument (pp23f.). In doing this Ricoeur is giving operative priority to secular discourse for the entirety of his book, but the ultimate priority of God is maintained both in his thinking and work as a whole.

³¹ Again this kind of dialogue is evident in Jeremy Begbie's *Theology, Music and Time*.

In both Barth's and McFadyen's theology the pressure of interpretation moves from the particular to the general. In contrast to a theologian like Paul Tillich, Barth and McFadyen do not operate with an *a priori* (Procrustean?) framework into which their theological enquiry and engagement with secular discourse is forced. Rather, both let the object of enquiry determine the form and content of their approach. For Barth this entails the absolute priority of Christology in his theological method. For McFadyen it means moving from the experience of, say, children who were abused to general points about abuse. This is also one of the great strengths of David Ford's theology (Chapter 1 above), in that his conversations occur largely on an *ad hoc* and eclectic basis (hence the difference in his approach from Paul Tillich).

In terms of the subject-matter of this thesis, neither Barth nor McFadyen operated with a prior conception of what it means to be human, or what sin is. In each case the nature of humanity and the nature of sin was derived from the particular from which the general point developed. This also does better justice to the nature of theological enquiry in a fallen world as it recognises the provisionality of our claims.

Thesis 9: There cannot be an objective, a priori criteria for discernment or structuring the relation between theology and secular discourse. Theology must take the form of a Nachdenken.

Following from Thesis 8, the structure of the relationship between theological and secular discourse cannot be determined in advance of the dialogue. Consequently, there are no concrete criteria which can prescribe the relationship between theology and secular discourse. The closest to a criterion that we can get is in maintaining the priority of God in theological method (Theses 3 and 4). But again,

there are no criteria which can be applied in advance of the discussion to prescribe how the priority of God is to be maintained. Rather, the dialogue is to be carried out with integrity and faithfulness to the 'field of force' determined by the theological framework. This framework cannot be derived in advance, but can only be derived from the trinitarian self-revelation of God. Theology therefore takes the form of a *Nachdenken* and is ultimately guided by prayer and the activity of the Holy Spirit.

4. A Return to the Webster/ Ford Debate

As an introduction to some of the core issues the thesis addresses, Chapter 1 considered the recent Webster/ Ford debate as representative of Types 4 and 3 (respectively) of Hans Frei's typology. At the end of a thesis arguing for a position between Types 3 and 4, it is only fitting that we return to the terms of the Webster/ Ford debate to see whether any further light can be shed on it – perhaps even a resolution. In this section, we will offer further consideration of the categories 'Type 3 and 4' (including the possibility of a Type 3.5), and highlight some of the strengths and weaknesses of both Webster's and Ford's positions. In doing this, a move towards a resolution will be made.

First, in Chapter 1 above, it was argued that David Ford's position can be placed in Type 3 and John Webster's in Type 4. However, it was indicated there that their placement in this categories was not as clear-cut as it might have been. Regarding Ford, there were two caveats. The first caveat was that his thought had a leaning towards Type 4. In other words, Ford himself would both envisage his work, and hopes that it is determined in large part by the distinct subject-matter of Christian theology. His earlier work on Karl Barth and embrace of John Webster's proposed way of approaching a theology of 'self and salvation' show this to be the case.

Similarly, as Ford makes clear in one of his criticisms of Webster, he envisages that 'the central truths [of Christianity] are such that they cry out to be related to the whole of reality and to every human being' and that 'intensive conversation' is one important way of doing this. In other words, Ford takes the core tenets of the Christian faith for granted, and recognises the need for theological engagement with the contemporary world on their basis. Consequently, it might be argued that Ford's position comes very close to McFadyen's, so why place him in Type 3?

McFadyen's thought was argued to be a development of, and stand in basic continuity with Barth's theological orientation towards Type 3. In this regard, there are strong similarities between McFadyen and Ford (not least because both combine an interest in Barth with the influence of Daniel Hardy). However, I would argue that Ford has moved further towards Type 3 than McFadyen – so far in fact that he is no longer in Type 4 (especially in his later work). In defence of Ford, it might be argued that his position simply represents Type 4 (or possibly 3.5) done badly, that is, his work is in Type 4, he has just failed to give appropriate priority to God's self-revelation in Christ through the Spirit. This may or may not be so, but in either case, this means that his work as it actually appears is Type 3.

The second caveat is that Ford's thought is placed in Type 3 for different reasons than other theologies of this Type such as Paul Tillich's or even Schleiermacher's. The reasons for this have been mentioned on a few occasions above, but the core difference is this. Tillich's thought functions with an existential (universal) framework from which he approaches theology, whereas Ford's work proceeds on the basis of *ad hoc* correlations between particulars. Showing his debt to Daniel Hardy, Ford emphatically rejects any kind of universal framework for

approaching a 'correlation'. However, because Ford's work does not give explicit priority to either theology or his conversation partners, it falls into Type 3.

A similar problem is evident with John Webster's theology. His work was placed in Type 4 with a leaning towards Type 5 (i.e. Type 4/5). As Ford points out in his response to Webster's review, Webster has a narrower understanding of the task of theology than was conceived by Aquinas and Barth (because they 'took on extraordinarily broad theological responsibilities in their situations'). It is for this reason – his desire to do 'straight systematics' 'as though nothing had happened' – that it was argued his thought appears in Type 4/5. Webster gives unambiguous priority to Frei's second pole – approaching Christian theology from within (by giving significant weight to the unique subject-matter of Christian theology). The main point is clear: neither Ford's or Webster's thought fits neatly within the categories in Frei's typology.

This point clearly has a significant bearing on the discussion of the possibility of a Type 3.5 in Thesis 2 above. There it was suggested that McFadyen's position could be understood either as a Type 3.5 (that is, a distinct Type from Types 3 and 4), or as a variation of Type 4 (albeit close to the boundary with Type 3). It was also suggested that, on balance, the latter option is probably the most accurate. The discussion of Ford and Webster confirms this. There is significant scope within the types as they stand for a range of positions which may not fall at the heart of each type. In other words, the types are (or can be understood to be) flexible enough to incorporate a variety of positions, and that McFadyen's is 'Type 4 with a leaning towards Type 3'. By way of contrast, Ford's position leans so far that it actually ends up in Type 3.

Second, there are some significant strengths and weaknesses which are evident in both Webster's and Ford's positions which have a bearing on this thesis. We will address Webster's position first. The most significant strength of Webster's position is his unambiguous affirmation of the absolute and ultimate priority of God in theological method. This is so clear that it impacts the whole of his theology in terms of both form and content. Consequently, in his review of Ford, he poses the question: 'Is there a given shape, a (flexible) canon of texts and problems in which it is the first task of the theologian to be instructed and in the face of which originality is unimportant?' – an approach which is not often reflected in the theological academy. It was primarily for this reason, that a dialogue with a Type 4 thinker was considered to be more valuable than with a Type 3 thinker, and furthermore, why (if I had to) I would side with Webster over Ford. This is also the reason for Webster's somewhat vehement attack of Ford's approach. However, there is also a corresponding weakness which is best highlighted by means of considering Ford's greatest strength – dialogue.

Ford's approach to theology is clearly much broader than Webster's. Consequently, Ford views his theology as 'one type of architecture in the theological city'. Ford's approach is a conversational theology based upon the premise that a God who relates to everyone and everything can have potentially unlimited questions and conversations, and the focus of Ford's project is to engage with some of these. In other words, the great strength of Ford's theology is to engage theology in a wide range of conversations, often with non-theological sources, from which theology gains many useful insights.

The key to Ford's approach, and it is one that he may have overlooked, is first having a good grasp of 'theology'. The kind of approach Ford advocates (if it is to be

done well) is only possible if one is thoroughly grounded in the Webster type approach (i.e. 'straight systematics'). In this regard, we might say that Ford's task is secondary to Webster's (this is emphatically not to say that it is unimportant). However, to say that it is secondary risks calling into question the central argument of this thesis, that theological enquiry ('straight dogmatics') has two main aspects which are to be understood as part of a single task: to reflect critically on the trinitarian self-revelation of God as testified to in the Christian scriptures, doctrine, tradition and history and to engage critically with the social, cultural, and intellectual world in which we are living. Put this way, we might argue by way of a caricature, that Webster does the former and Ford the latter. This, however, would be to put the matter too strongly.

There are two main reasons why this caricature does not call into question the main argument of the thesis. The first is that Ford's task is one that gives too much away from the distinct subject-matter of theology at the expense of his 'conversations' (hence he was placed in Type 3). In this respect, Ford neglects the 'straight dogmatics' aspect of theology. The second reason is that it is not possible to do 'straight dogmatics' well without engaging with the determinate situation. Even though Webster places little weight on this aspect of the theological task, his thought still engages with the determinate situation, in much the same way as Barth's thought was 'indirectly a political commitment' (Chapter 1 above). It follows from this that Webster is in fact engaging with the contemporary situation if for no other reason than his use of language (i.e. English that is embodied within a twenty-first century conceptuality). His patterns of thought have been shaped by the contemporary university with its Enlightenment heritage, and whether or not Webster addresses this directly (which he does on occasion), he cannot help but engage with the

contemporary situation by restating the core tenets of the Christian faith within his own time. This was, of course, one of Barth's main points – that it is only by listening obediently to the Word of God that warranted theological engagement with the contemporary context can occur. What, then, of the possibility of a resolution of the debate?

In response to this question, two points must be made. First, there is a sense in which a resolution is not possible. Both thinkers differ in their understanding of the theological task, and although they are engaged in dialogue, are convinced of the rightness of their own positions. Similarly, as just indicated, both have significant strengths to their positions. This is important to bear in mind when considering a 'resolution'. In order for a resolution to occur, one of three things needs to happen: either Webster moves to Ford's position, Ford moves to Webster's, or a compromise needs to be made. Given their arguments, it is unlikely that the first two options will occur. This leaves us with compromise. As we have seen, Ford's position is broad enough to incorporate Webster's, but Webster's is not broad enough to encompass Ford's. Unless a compromise on Webster's part to Ford's approach to theology is to happen, a resolution cannot occur.

However, we might do well to ask in passing why a resolution is important. As their positions stand, they both contribute in different ways to the theological world. Both have important contributions to make. The problem occurs if we are to consider Webster's 'either/or' – that is, whether theology should be done according to a Type4/5 model or a Type 2/3. For Webster, there simply is no other way. We could, of course, reject this approach in the same way as Ford. However, given the argument of this thesis, especially concerning the ultimate priority of God, there is a question about the way theology should be done give this priority. It has been the

concern of this thesis to unpack this. Put differently, as theologians we are not concerned primarily with interesting and, to refer back to Webster, 'original' conversations with other disciplines in the interests of the academy, we are concerned with theological truth. If there is a 'truth-of-the-matter', and it is to be determined in accordance with affirming the ultimate priority of God in theological method, then some approaches to theology cannot be considered as useful as others. Some ways of approaching the theological task are simply better in that they are more closely orientated to and determined by the object of theology. It is for this reason that we must consider the possibility of a resolution.

Second, to some extent a resolution is possible and it is one which falls in accordance with the central argument of this thesis. The position outlined at length throughout the thesis combines the strengths of both Webster's and Ford's positions. Ultimate priority for theological method rests upon the trinitarian self-revelation of God in Christ through the Spirit, but engagement with other disciplines can help shed further light on theological truth and vice versa. In other words, it is possible to maintain the strengths of both positions, which does involve some compromise, without losing Webster's theological orientation or Ford's breadth of conversations. The compromise will have to rest primarily with Webster's concern to do 'straight dogmatics' as he defines it. As we have seen, Barth (and McFadyen) do this, but also engage explicitly with secular discourse.³² It is also worth repeating that Barth recognises theological truth in the secular sphere, but thinks that the Christian theologian should not spend time searching for this, rather use the primary sources of the theologian's tool-kit to expound the content of theology (which is aided by engagement with secular discourse). This does not by any means eliminate the

³² Again see Barth, *CD IV/3.i*, pp118-135 and Hunsinger, 'Epilogue: Secular Parables of the Truth'.

importance of engagement with secular discourse. The basis for the dialogue between theology and secular discourse was not to recognise theological truth in secular discourse *per se*, rather that through the dialogue the interests of theological truth might be served. One way of doing this, I suggest, is by approaching theology through the nine theses outlined above. In this respect, the nine theses can be understood as a significant move towards a resolution of Webster's and Ford's positions. Secular discourse can enable theology to do its job better. This is a task which I hope both Webster and Ford would embrace.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to bring McFadyen's and Barth's thought into an explicit dialogue so that the differences between their positions could be clarified and some more general conclusions could be drawn for structuring the relation between theology and secular discourse more widely. The first main section considered the respective methods of McFadyen and Barth in relation to their anthropology and hamartiology. It was concluded that McFadyen's approach is a further extension of Barth's basic orientation towards Type 3, but also remains consistent to Barth's premises and fundamental outlook. Following from this, it was argued that McFadyen is more open to dialogue with secular discourse than Barth, but Barth takes it more seriously than McFadyen.

The distinction between theology and secular discourse which has been functioning throughout the thesis was also called into question, particularly with reference to Barth's thought. It was argued that there is a sense in which it is an inappropriate distinction to apply to Barth's thought because of his apparent lack of concern with secular discourse, and at the same time an extremely appropriate

distinction for Barth because the boundaries between theology and secular discourse are drawn more rigidly and narrowly. For Barth, any thought form (including many 'theologies') that do not conform to the Word of God is 'secular'.

The second main section set out nine theses which had a twofold purpose. First, they operated as conclusions to the exposition of McFadyen and Barth which occurred in Chapter 2-5. In this respect, they were dependent upon the preceding material and cannot be read apart from it. Secondly, they have a more general function in accordance with the wider concerns of this thesis, that is, giving a structured response to the question 'how ought theology to be done?'. In this respect, the nine theses have a wider significance than simply being conclusions to an exposition of McFadyen and Barth and have the potential to contribute to a range of theological discussions, not least the 'theology of culture'.

The third main section picked up the Webster/ Ford debate which was used in the opening chapter for setting out the terms of the debate. A return to this debate not only had the effect of rounding off the thesis as a whole, but enabled further discussion of the two main types operative in the thesis and confirmed the core argument of the thesis as a move towards a resolution of Webster and Ford. In doing this, the nine theses could be seen to set out a theological method in which the priority of God is maintained as well as critical engagement with the contemporary context by means of secular discourse.

CONCLUSION

The primary concern of this thesis has been with a dialogical approach to theology. From the outset it was argued that theological enquiry ('straight dogmatics') has two main aspects which are to be understood as part of a single task. The first aspect is to reflect critically on the trinitarian self-revelation of God to which testimony is borne in Christian scripture, doctrine, tradition and history. The second aspect is to engage critically with the social, cultural and intellectual world in which we are living. From this understanding of theology it follows that it is crucial for theology to engage with secular discourse. The specific concern of the thesis has been to identify how theology should engage with secular discourse.

Chapter 1 offered a survey of various approaches to the relationship between theology and secular discourse drawing heavily from Hans Frei's 'types' of theology. David Ford's and John Webster's work was then used to expound the two polar positions of this thesis – Type 3 and Type 4. Type 3 gives equal weight to Christian self-description and philosophical frameworks and proceeds by way of a 'correlation' between the Christian faith and other disciplines, whereas Type 4 gives priority to Christian self-description. The pressure of interpretation moves from theology to other disciplines. It recognises that other disciplines can make important and significant contributions to the Christian faith but that the trinitarian self-revelation of God retains ultimate priority. It was also suggested that Alistair McFadyen's approach falls between Types 3 and 4, and further, that this is how theology should engage with secular discourse. Karl Barth's thought was also introduced as a conversation partner. His thought falls into Type 4 which was considered a better point of comparison than

Type 3 because of the necessity of giving God's self-revelation ultimate priority over secular discourse.

Chapters 2 and 3 considered the relationship between theology and secular discourse in Alistair McFadyen's theological anthropology and doctrine of sin, and Chapters 4 and 5 Karl Barth's respective approach. These chapters involved detailed textual analyses of the approaches of McFadyen and Barth, the results of which were brought together in Chapter 6. In Chapter 6 Barth's and McFadyen's work was compared, and on the basis of the comparison some conclusions were drawn. More specifically, it was argued that McFadyen's approach is a further extension of Barth's basic orientation towards Type 3, but remains consistent to Barth's basic premises and fundamental outlook. Additionally, it was suggested that McFadyen is more open to dialogue with secular discourse than Barth, but that Barth takes it more seriously than McFadyen.

The distinction between theology and secular discourse which has been operative from Chapter 1 was also called into question, particularly with reference to Barth's thought. It was argued that there is a sense in which it is an inappropriate distinction to apply to Barth's thought because of his apparent lack of concern with secular discourse, and at the same time an extremely appropriate distinction for Barth because the boundaries between theology and secular discourse are drawn more rigidly and narrowly. For Barth, any thought form (including many 'theologies') that do not conform to the Word of God is 'secular'.

The chapter continued by setting out nine theses which operate as conclusions to the exposition of McFadyen and Barth in Chapters 2-5, as well as expositing them in a more widely applicable form. These nine theses have the potential to contribute to a range of theological discussions extending well beyond the constraints of this thesis. A return to the Webster-Ford debate from Chapter 1 also helped illustrate this as well

as clarify the concluding position of the thesis. In short, secular discourse enables theology to do its job better.

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